

Spring 5-2012

What's in a Test? Constructions of Literacy and Its Implications for English Proficiency Test Design

Josye Marie Brookter
University of Southern Mississippi

Follow this and additional works at: <https://aquila.usm.edu/dissertations>



Part of the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#), [English Language and Literature Commons](#), and the [Higher Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Brookter, Josye Marie, "What's in a Test? Constructions of Literacy and Its Implications for English Proficiency Test Design" (2012). *Dissertations*. 541.
<https://aquila.usm.edu/dissertations/541>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by The Aquila Digital Community. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of The Aquila Digital Community. For more information, please contact Joshua.Cromwell@usm.edu.

The University of Southern Mississippi

WHAT'S IN A TEST? CONSTRUCTIONS OF LITERACY AND ITS
IMPLICATIONS FOR ENGLISH PROFICIENCY TEST DESIGN

by

Josye Maria Brookter

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2012

ABSTRACT

WHAT'S IN A TEST: CONSTRUCTIONS OF LITERACY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR ENGLISH PROFICIENCY TEST DESIGN

by

Josye Maria Brookter

May 2012

Although college-level composition pedagogy is becoming more open to language diversity, some crucial current-traditional vestiges remain, particularly in proficiency exams. Too often these exams only identify students who are slipping through the cracks of literacy instruction, while the definition of English represented by this test limits alternate notions of writing and literacy.

The test represents local, institutional values about written English, although those values must also be consistent with national standards. Typically, administrators, teachers, and students feel compelled to choose traditional forms of writing over postmodern ones, a choice that is seldom discussed in the literature. Conflicting perspectives of English were examined at William Carey University, a liberal arts institution under a new mandate to replace the English Proficiency Exam (EPE) discontinued in 2008. The single-test assessment era has ended for Carey, as it has at other institutions described in this study. What is unique at Carey is that the English department staff who created and evaluated the exam have decided to reevaluate it by holding cross-campus conversations with faculty in other departments, asking what definition(s) of English function(s) in their departments, whether they are aligned with the English department's notions of English, and to what degree is the value of writing.

The study found vastly different perceptions of English during the period the EPE was active. Students had to be aware of these differences and bring them to bear on the exam, especially dissonance between the hyper-formal written English of the English Proficiency Exam and the Englishes practiced by many of the students, the compartmentalizations of discipline-specific needs, the individualistic expression required by one department, or the visual literacy advocated by another. Some students, I discovered, clearly sat for this exam with mixed messages about the nature of English, and they identified English as so rule-based that they often failed or barely passed. Once Writing Across the Curriculum practices advocated by writing program administrators become a more visible part of such assessments, what students already know about English from their university experience can become more evident.

COPYRIGHT BY
JOSYE MARIA BROOKTER
2012

The University of Southern Mississippi

WHAT'S IN A TEST? CONSTRUCTIONS OF LITERACY AND ITS
IMPLICATIONS FOR ENGLISH PROFICIENCY TEST DESIGN

by

Josye Maria Brookter

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Approved:

Director

Dean of the Graduate School

May 2012

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My sincere thanks to my dissertation chair, Dr. Jameela Lares, and my other committee members Drs. Sheldon Walcher, Thomas Richardson, Martina Sciolino, Andrea Wesley, and Maureen Ryan for their encouragement and guidance toward the movement of this study from reflection to the exploration, investigation, and articulation of this project. I would particularly like to thank Dr. Jameela Lares for nurturing the seeds of this study and for understanding the craft of academic knowledge making as involving creativity and constant conversation. Her ability to recognize the need for this work during times when I was overly critical was the motivation and support that followed me to the end. I am most grateful for her advice, and my appreciation is beyond words.

I would also like to thank William Carey University faculty across campus who took on the dual role of being both the focus of this study while also dedicating the time and attention to listen and respond to my research and writing. Special thanks to Dr. Thomas Richardson in the Department of Language and Literature at Carey for his insight and direction, and to the English department faculty for their discussions about the complexity of English pedagogy. My gratitude also goes to the students at Carey who served as subjects in this study and have to remain anonymous, but who I will never forget are individuals both in and out of the classroom.

Lastly, this project would have ended early on had it not been for my daughter, Arissa, my husband, Raymond, other family members, and my friend, Betty Chesengeny. Their multicultural stories inspired me to keep writing.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|------|
| ABSTRACT | ii |
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS | iv |
| ABBREVIATIONS | viii |
| CHAPTER | |
| I. LANGUAGE DIVERSITY AND WRITTEN ASSESSMENT | 1 |
| II. MEASURING LEARNING THROUGH THE CONTEXT OF STUDENT AGENCY | 30 |
| III. FACULTY RECEPTION OF THE MULTI-LITERATE TEXT IN THE ACADEMY | 82 |
| IV. KILLER DICHOTOMIES THAT EXIST WITHIN POST-PROCESS CLASSROOMS AND ON PROFICIENCY EXAMS | 126 |
| V. BROADENING THE SCOPE OF ACCEPTABLE ACADEMIC DISCOURSE FOR WRITTEN ASSESSMENTS ON CAMPUSES | 158 |
| APPENDIXES | 181 |
| WORKS CITED | 198 |

ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---------|-------------------------------------|
| AAE | African American English |
| ATL-DIS | Alternative Discourse |
| EPE | English proficiency exam |
| ESL | English as a second language |
| NNS | Non-native speaker |
| SE | Standard English |
| WAC | Writing across the curriculum |
| WPA | Writing program administration/-tor |

CHAPTER I

LANGUAGE DIVERSITY AND WRITING ASSESSMENT

When not carried to excess, the balanced structure [of English usage] is agreeable to the ear, is a help to the memory, and gives emphasis to each of the balanced expressions; when carried to excess, it makes a writer the slave of sound; it produces upon the reader the monotonous effect without the charm of rhythm; and it leads to a sacrifice of strict truth.

—Adams Sherman Hill, *The Principles of Rhetoric and Their Applications* (1878)

Since the first English Proficiency Exam (EPE) was designed by Adams Sherman Hill, president of Harvard in 1874, who wanted students to exhibit balanced structure in English in both classrooms and on proficiency exams, until today, competency testing in English requires enormous amounts of reflection and planning. Not only English faculty but all other faculty who design writing projects in their classrooms and even students and campus governing bodies define what the particular community values about the English language for these tests since they must mirror classroom instruction and student learning. Due to this requirement of incorporating local values and perceptions of English into a test format, evaluators, often Writing Program Administrators, work to investigate the ways written English can be defined in order to be measured. Indeed, standardizing English for assessment purposes based on the values of diverse groups is no easy task for any institution of higher education.

Historically, English departments have relied on the validity (logically sound) and reliability (consistently sound) standards of classical test theory that began in the social sciences. Scholars in the field of Rhetoric and Composition are in agreement that writing assessments are necessary and that direct measurement (whole essay writing) is more effective than indirect measurement (sentence-level testing). However, what type of English on a proficiency exam should be deemed proficient is a point of contention

among these scholars. Some have questioned how there could possibly be room for alternate discourses in such a serious genre as an essay exam, a genre that bespeaks formalism, is considered mainstream, and meets the requirements of validity and reliability (Faigley, *Assessing Writers' Knowledge* 109-113; Gere "Written Composition" 44-58). The behavior of accepting formalism or Standard English Only in written assessments is a norm that has been set by ACT and SAT tests and the use of machine scoring for essay tests. However, scholars committed to cultural studies argue that students should have the opportunity in the college environment to articulate their knowledge of multiple discourses (Gilyard, "Cross Talk" 325-31; Rickford and Rickford 223-232); Sandra Kamusikiri even suggests that alternative discourses can be used in evaluative situations (188). The idea of cultural-pluralism on proficiency exams seems to stem from the fact that in the last fifty years, current-traditionalism or conventionalism in the composition classroom has mostly been minimized in favor of multicultural, postmodern, post-process curriculums and instruction. The postmodern classroom is largely due to constructivist theory that finds that students often rely on culture to problem solve, create, and organize when formulating and writing their ideas (what Paulo Freire identifies as an educational process for transformation and empowerment). The question then becomes why has not a test that calls for formal English not caught up with writing classrooms that emphasize the power of language diversity and even how different forms of English are necessary to meet audience need? The more difficult question is why proficiency testing in English represents this either/or dichotomy between English and variations of English rather than both/and. The purpose of my study is to investigate language, power, faculty and student perceptions of English

within the scope of evaluation planning and design in order to uncover the degree to which validity and reliability standards allow for alternative discourse on proficiency exams.

What is at Stake With High Stakes Testing

What is often discussed in the literature of Rhetoric and Composition is the immediate, short-term, but nevertheless, costly stakes of these exams. Students at some schools may not graduate, may have to take a remedial course, or in some cases repeat the English course for which the exam serves as a final. When Edward White explains that “City University of New York, the Georgia State University system, and the California State University have felt it necessary to protect the quality of their degrees by a writing certification requirement” (*Assigning* 107), he is suggesting that there are basic skills in English that every student should know of which the degree affirms. The test, therefore, works as a stop-gap measure that insures each student is leaving with the same basic skills in English as the next graduate, and one that indicates that remediation procedures are in place to guarantee that the goal of common standards are complete. Of course, there is the high stakes of an immediate cost both financially and professionally when a student has to repeat a course or explain a failed test in English to an employer. However, the stakes are also high for English programs. English faculty may have to shift funding or justify funding for more remedial classes within the parameter of losing other course offerings they could have adopted if not for remedial classes. They may also perceive of remediation as not the acceptable norm in most other departments with the exception of math. There is also the issue of lower graduation rates for the department, which can affect allocation of funding from the university for program development. Although cost can be crucial to both teachers and students, the cost of testing also

indicates theoretically that there is one basic set of skills in English on the proficiency exam being re-taught in remedial classes, a linear progression from test to remediation that also makes the exam both valid and reliable. However, what is equally indicative and cause for concern is that if teachers and administrators are interpreting basic skills in English differently on the exam, then students being remediated and English departments working to maintain a Standard English Only ideology in institutions become suspect.

Although making these exams most accurate so as to be both realistic and cost-effective to students and academic institutions is necessary, the metaphorical cost of these exams is even more weighty. What is rarely made visible in the research in this field is the long-term, high stakes nature of these exams in terms of how English is transmitted, what messages are sent through the medium of the exams, and how students and teachers are positioned behind seemingly impenetrable roadblocks when designing and implementing them. Not unlike the No Child Left Behind Act in effect all across the country that also reaffirms college literacy testing, writing assessment is thoroughly entrenched in empirical measurement procedures associated most closely with the somewhat humanistic studies done in the social sciences. According to the history of writing test assessment, classical test theory has been and continues to be shaped and refined by the fields of educational measurement, psychometrics, psychology, and education (Huot 125). Classical test theory requires that any test be both valid and reliable statistically so that the test can be considered as viable and legitimate in academia (see Huot's explanation of psychometrics 126-27). Validity means that the test has to measure what it is supposed to measure, and reliability means that evaluations of the test have to be consistent. Therefore, traditionally, English Proficiency Exams have been prescriptive. Evaluators have often designed current-traditional testing which began with

grammar-based proficiency tests and has carried over to essay writing. Testing more for form than content meets the psychometric need for face validity while at the same time it also limits the definition of English to sentence level accuracy that many students quickly latch upon when writing. In grammar proficiency exams, having teachers identify a subject-verb agreement error in a sentence or comma error in a student sentence is not that difficult if students take a sentence-level exam or a paragraph-level exam, or as writing program administrator, Edward White says, “A short essay exam that only measures sentence and paragraph construction” (*Assigning* 101). These tests would certainly align with what instructors constantly point out to students in the composition classroom: how to make more complex sentences, avoid subject-verb agreement errors, use commas and other editorial and stylistic features. We also find that a rubric stating that the student must be able to identify subject, verbs, fragments, commas, semi-colons, and other errors aligns with the grammar instruction the student has been taught and is now being tested on within the grammar test and this meets both validity and reliability standards. Hill explains this need for face validity when he indicates that Harvard’s test is in place to eradicate the lack of precision found in student writing:

Some—a smaller number, however, than in previous years—showed such utter ignorance of punctuation as to put commas at the end of complete sentences, or between words that no rational being would separate from one another; and a few began sentences with small letters, or began every long word with a capital letter. (Hill, “An Answer” 10-12)

Indeed, correct grammar and mechanics has the added value for readers of, as Hill states, helping with their “memory” and sustaining the “balanced expressions” of “sound,” “rhythm,” and “strict truth.” Moreover, when teaching, tests, and student results all align

as Deiderich and Odell have recognized, the psychometric need for correlation has been met (Deiderich *Measuring Growth* 85-99; Odell, "Defining and Assessing" 95-138).

Short grammar tests used to determine proficiency in grammar sends the message to students that they are only going to be tested on one small area or unit within the larger field of English. This straightforward message, however, should not misrepresent the test or confuse students as to what is expected from them. However, many of these essay exams are not short, do not just specify that grammar is the only item or the most significant item that will be graded, and do not indicate that form cannot be separated from content.

Even when teachers moved to holistic grading and writing, many of them still found current-traditionalism underlying the exam, and undermining their intentions. Brian Huot gives a detailed account of the history of Rhetoric and Composition's work in written test assessment in *(Re)Articulating Writing Assessment for Teaching and Learning*. There was a massive shift in thinking in the field of Rhetoric and Composition in the latter 1960s where some instructors no longer defined good writing solely as correct grammar to insisting that grammar should be viewed as a tool supporting critical thinking; this conceptual shift prompted a reevaluation of proficiency testing. Therefore, direct measurement or holistic testing became a fully realized commitment from English departments in the 1970s (21-22). As a matter of fact, in the last three decades, composition scholars have ensured that writing tests rather than multiple choice tests measure writing and encouraged the process approach apparent in portfolio methods of assessment (Huot 23). The longer essay exams that have since been given at about eighty-four percent of colleges and universities in the country (Gordon 29) have followed this theoretical premise in the field.

Thereafter, writing had to be judged holistically with a focus on how well content is developed both formally and creatively. The difficulty here is when the tests appear to require student agency and creativity that will be scored by a holistic, general rubric actually becomes weighted grading with product over process having primacy. When such current-traditional weighting is still being made in these longer essays, it suggests to teachers, students, and test theorists that writing can, in fact, be separated and not viewed holistically in order to pass a proficiency test.

Even with holistic grading in place to benefit more types of writing, the current-traditional focus on structure can reduce holistic grading. Compositionist Liz Hamp-Lyons's research on immigrant populations on campus uncovered that "various immigrant groups" who speak English as a second language (ESL) or nonnative speakers (NNS) are at a severe disadvantage taking written proficiency assessments with holistic scoring (228). First, faculty not exposed to various cultures may grade lower (Hamp-Lyons 228). Roberta Van, Frederick Lorenz, and Daisy Meyer found that "the less exposure faculty members have to NNS writing, the more affected they are by grammatical errors in that writing" (qtd. in Hamp-Lyons 228). Hamp-Lyons believes holistic scoring limits teachers' abilities to read as critical thinkers (228). She suggests primary-trait scoring or multiple-trait scoring in order to have the diagnostic information needed for program development. Hamp-Lyons believes if these scoring methods were in place, then the weights could be adjusted so that higher order thinking skills such as ideas in a text were given more weight than sentence structure (229-232). Students would still have to understand where they are making local errors, but the respect for global techniques would give students some control or ownership over their writing.

Thus, she argues that grading for basic skills is necessary, but does not take into account all of students' writing abilities.

Other scholars argue that proficiency exams, in order to be viewed more holistically, should assess for maximum competency, although most of them do not. Using Afrocentric theory to speak to the meta-narrative at work with Standard English Only in written test assessment, Sandra Kamusikiri tries to show with her model how new forms of literacy on written test assessments could work in order to accommodate diversity. In her article "African American English and Writing Assessment: An Afrocentric Approach," Kamusikiri finds that students who use African American English (AAE) at times approach writing situations differently than Standard English speakers. Specifically, these writers may use "AAE during early brainstorming or early drafts with the knowledge that they will change the language to fit audience and purpose for writing in later drafts" (Kamusikiri 188). At other times, "they may *consciously* (emphasis mine) use AAE as a rhetorical strategy to best get their ideas across" (Kamusikiri 188). Thus, she calls on test assessors to consider adopting an Afrocentric approach to assessment for these writers and a polycentric approach for all other diverse groups (Kamusikiri 198). Specifically, she asks that test administrators reevaluate the generic test.

So what would an Afrocentric English Proficiency Exam resemble? Kamusikiri tells us that this test would allow students to use "context-dependent language," "high-context response," "topic-centered style" and "generative principles" (200-201). Kamusikiri's point here is that all writing is contextual. When students sit to take the EPE they may assume that the academic environment will not sanction writing in the context of their home discourses. She says we are not to assume that all students will

understand or choose to write within a Standard English framework just because they are taking an English Proficiency Exam. They may use an Afrocentric theoretical context intentionally or unintentionally. However, Kamusikiri joins the directive of Edward White and Brian Huot that all written assessment instructions should be as specific as possible so that students clearly know what is expected of them when taking the test. Even if these evaluative instruments are not Afrocentric or polysemic in nature, which she does not advocate that they be, the need for a theoretical and contextual framework and a very formal writing style must be conveyed to students in detail: “Assessors need to define explicitly, by means of test guidelines, prompts, and scoring guides, the language and discourse styles that are acceptable” (200). Such explicitness goes beyond telling the student in the writing prompt that a “What is Happiness?” paper is a definition paper and a “What Does Volunteerism Entail?” paper is an explanation paper. Instead, by restricting languages, the proficiency exam is actually acknowledging that language diversity does exist. Moreover, such acknowledgement sends a message to students that their language has legitimacy, but is just not being assessed on the test and that it is rather minimum competency skills based on grammar proficiency and even universal themes and a nationalistic/comformist rhetoric that are being assessed. However, if ethnic discourses are permitted on these tests, then we should assume that maximum competency is being defined by test designers as the ability to play with language in order to discuss the values of minority cultures.

Both camps—the current-traditional and the post-process test theorists—open up paradigms or frameworks that often prohibit the college instructor and the student test writer from making rhetorical moves in writing and reading that emphasize a broader definition of proficiency, that is, literacy. First, in terms of a traditional paradigm in

written assessment, here is the question Hill and Harvard should have had to confront: how does a school balance the constant need for correlation results for program and accreditation reviews, which can easily be accomplished by counting grammatical errors, without sending the message to students that the focus on grammar negates the need for them to actually say something beyond surface-level ideas? Norbert Elliot provokes this question when he says that the educational system promotes inferiority, which consequently produces docility (350-351). Used as an evaluative tool, what student writers often say on these current-traditional tests does not rate as highly as how well they say it. Thus, measuring for substantial content becomes all the more difficult on objective-based writing exams, because in this case, teachers of composition and administrators who want such information would have to acknowledge that much of classroom writing is subjective and that even in test situations the student writer of the content and the teacher-grader assessing the content engage in a highly subjective process of communication. The idea that writing is a creative process, therefore, blurs much of the domain of validity and reliability that classic test theory establishes for large-scale assessments. In fact, we could begin to see to what degree subjectivity lingers in written assessment if we were to change Hill's words ever so slightly and view "balanced expression" as content rather than form. In this way, how the piece "sound[s]," the "rhythm" of the piece, and "the truth" that it holds would be interpreted in a completely new subjective way by many compositionists, particularly those who are affiliated with process or postmodern theoretical orientations (Elbow "Vernacular Englishes" 126-38; Belanoff). For the reasons of wanting to measure how well a student communicates, takes ownership of his/her own writing, and uses grammar appropriately to convey ideas,

process teachers over a century after having proficiency exams are still working to revise these type tests to measure grammar in context.

The dilemma of trying to create a more accurate proficiency exam also exists for nontraditional teachers. In nontraditional test assessments, students may feel pressured to incorporate their home language on the exam even if they do not see the need for revealing their personal lives. Such pressure would indicate to students that using dialect or nonstandard ways of thinking found in dialectal patterns in a proficiency test rates higher than using only Standard English. The very idea of primary-trait scoring that Hamp-Lyons speaks of may suggest that nonstandard discourse is encouraged despite the fact that the goal of all academic institutions is to equip students with mainstream English. Thus, in reference to Hamp-Lyons need to be inclusive and Kamusikiri's need to be inclusive, use of minority discourse does not just serve an emotional purpose. Minority discourses, not unlike Standard English Only discourse, forward a politicized agenda prioritizing a way of being over other forms of nationalistic discourse, in the same way that Afrocentric, Feminist, or Queer discourses and a host of other discourses that are based in theoretical contexts present a political agenda. However, if these discourses are used to interrogate and often dismantle the power inherent in the Standard, is testing for mainstream English with the evaluator's intent of helping students acquire English that is accepted in the world of business the appropriate medium for such inquiry and resistance? And is rhetorical resistance what we ask for and expect from our students in a timed test that holds their academic careers in the balance? Thus, are we helping or hurting students with either post-process or current-traditional testing?

A second restriction the test poses for teachers and students is the situational disconnect between English instruction and English competency testing. The composition

teacher who may have practiced process pedagogy and diversity/inclusion methods in his or her composition classrooms now has to grade a large-scale assessment using a general rubric. The post-process teacher may change his/her theoretical perspective about the teaching and learning of writing on this exam is because although the definition of good writing is informed by administrators and teachers in the English Department, it is layered upon, evaluated, and approved by the entire college campus or university community and their expectations for writers. Thus, these tests are used as a gatekeeping mechanism upholding mission statements, accreditation articulations, and legislative mandates, which determine status and funding. Edward White calls proficiency exams barrier assessments because “everyone seems to accept them in both theory and practice as authenticating writing ability. And their role as barrier tests, which must be passed if a student is to proceed, is generally accepted and endorsed as appropriate” (*Assigning* 105). What White suggests with his pervasive *everyone* is that the students are not just writing to teachers who are the readers and graders or to a testing service staffed by educators. Rather, they are also writing to and for the entire university and the image the university has of the successful student writer who will earn a college degree with the university’s name on it. Thus, in cases where students are taking proficiency exams given by their teachers, they are aware that they are writing to some teachers they know and some they do not know, but they know all the teachers are from the same English Department. However, they almost cannot be said to be aware that they know the teacher is now reading from the standpoint of representing the university and its standards and sanctions rather than what teachers believe and do in their own classrooms. In other words, the teacher may change hats, and yet, the student writer may not be aware of the change in the composition evaluator. Another way of viewing this point is to ask how many times

classroom discussions about academic English are couched as, “Write well enough so that people or the public understands you,” rather than, “Write for what are common expectations every department in the university has for writing?” Do we even know what “basic rules” in English the entire university expects? I have had students write in all capital letters in their in-class work, which does not constitute acceptable formal writing to me because it gives the impression of yelling, but students say that other teachers accept such work. As another example, students leave out descriptions of their emotions in personal narratives because they are not allowed to use them in their science-oriented classes. Thus, students may have some teachers in mind when they sit for English proficiency exams, but they cannot be expected to understand what it means to write to and for an entire campus community.

The third roadblock implicit in these competency exams is the normalizing effect of standards. These competency exams tend to represent business as usual on college campuses and accurate reflections of direct measurements of college instruction. Moreover, in order to fit the paradigm of classic test theory and its objective on fairness, these exams must often be criterion-referenced in order to give every student an equal chance of passing them (White, “Pitfalls in Testing” 62-65). In order to be transparent, the exam, then, must be designed and read from a standpoint of minimum competency. In other words, those of us who teach composition must read the test for the most basic of writing skills: grammar and elementary issues of structure (introduction, supporting points, etc.). One teacher in test assessment on the William Carey University campus noted that our English Proficiency Exam was a minimum competency test. What this means is that the test must have items in it germane to a general knowledge of English while omitting prompts demanding a more sophisticated integration of composition skills.

Moreover, a minimum competency test in English seems to require a common, agreed upon definition of English; hence, the term *standardized* that is often attached explicitly or implicitly to this exam.

Standardization is the norm in proficiency testing because it provides an empirical measurement that satisfies testing firms and governing bodies. The information standardized testing provides helps these entities make decisions about the state of higher education and about changes that can be made that would improve student scores (White, *Assessment of Writing* 2). However, composition teachers and scholars are bothered by the notion of standards and teaching to a test in college classrooms. Standard conventions such as the five-paragraph essay, distance from the text in order to appear objective, and Standard English Only usage is acknowledged by them as one way to write, but not the only way to write. Post-process teachers have opened spaces in their classrooms to discuss the function and power of languages, that is, how language choices can be made to meet the needs of the author and his or her various communities. Moreover, in some post-process classrooms, as this study will show, the main objectives of student agency and identifying one's cultural capital through the use of home discourse written in English are at the center of these classrooms. How can a proficiency test designed to measure for standards ever have room for the post-process student who approaches the test with his culture and dialect in mind? In other words, how can minority students write and post-process teachers read non-standard discourse as passing within the framework of a very narrowly defined test measuring what merits as college-level English?

The roadblocks that are often inherent in these exams do contribute to student failure and teacher frustration and they should be removed. Indeed, I would argue that

one of the primary reasons students fail the EPE, Writing Proficiency Exam (WPE) and other forms of written assessment is because we test evaluators know things about the test that student test-takers do not know. Nevertheless, the possibilities of these exams to make students better writers are also relevant and necessary. Compositionists Marcia Farr and Gloria Nardini think what test administrators and other composition faculty do know is that these tests are of the essayist-literacy tradition found in the classroom, and many students are not so proficient in making use of the essayist-literacy conventions because they lack points of reference by which to enter this particular discourse. Farr and Nardini's research on the differences between cultural discourse and essayist-literacy conventions is apt for trying to combine the two so that students have the points of reference to enter academic dialogue, but they advocate that the one way this combination model can be accomplished is by using writing assessment as a way to develop "metalinguistic awareness of sociolinguistic difference, an awareness that can facilitate the teaching of essayist-literacy conventions" (114). What Farr and Nardini stress is that writing should be done within the context of student need and expectations for writing. If students are trying to make sense of their own communities or have the need to explain their communities to readers, then the center of their work can be home discourse patterns, and the role of English teachers would be to help them to incorporate essayist-literacy strategies to assist them in saying what they need to say better. Thus, their voices and the body of work in cultural studies advocate home discourse as one means of expression, though not the only means, but their purpose of focusing on home discourse is to instill the idea in compositionists and in composition classrooms that all students should be permitted to approach writing from the position that writing has options.

Of particular concern to composition scholars is what we should evaluate when we read assessment tests. Huot says the field has moved along with educational measurement and educational psychology from making sure the procedures for test assessment work to doing “the more recent work” on the “critique [of] current traditional writing practices”; a critique that opens a space for reading and evaluating hegemonic discourses (22). Thus, a student able to use contrastive rhetorics in a single document would prove that he or she has mastered Academic English.

However, the multicultural proficiency test writer is still a novel idea. Despite an effort by many evaluators to make test questions realistic in order to prompt students to write meaningful texts rather than focus on English skills and drills, there is the increased realization by scholars in Rhetoric and Composition, linguistics, education, psychology, and sociology that success or failure on competency tests in English still largely depends on the degree to which students can present a raceless, cultural-less, classless persona without reference to any alternative minority discourse features. These students should also forward a nationalistic value system and rhetoric by using only traditional, formal Standard English. By erasing culture, many students are left without a point of reference by which to capture the agency required on the exam. In order to add another voice to those of the researchers who advocate test reform in an effort to eliminate the restrictions to which students and teachers are bound, I have sought to identify in this dissertation the coded educational positions and political alignments informing test culture that students from nonstandard language backgrounds encounter and the ways in which the test design instrument itself “others” those minority writers.

Socio-linguists have documented the similarities and differences between the dialect patterns of upper and middle class students and their use of SE and the Black

English Vernacular (BEV) of lower class black speakers and writers as well as the value found in both types of discourse (Smitherman 212; Rickford and Rickford 47). Composition researchers increasingly have investigated the intellectual shrewdness and productivity of BEV speakers (see Heath, “Literate Traditions” 190-195; Campbell, *Getting in on the Groove* 1-22). Some composition textbook publishers have also found ways to honor diversity by placing readings by minority writers writing in their dialects, languages, and English in their textbooks and providing activities for students who use minority languages.¹ Two popular textbooks used today on the English 101 and 102 undergraduate level are *The Norton Field Guide to Writing* by Richard Bullock, Maureen Daly Goggin, and Francine Weinberg and *The Call to Write* by John Trimbur. The Spanish-American columnist Tanya Barrientos, in her selection in the *Norton*, writes Spanish in parts of her text without translating for her American readers (560-563). One of the questions at the end of the reading that the students must contemplate is why Barrientos performs this alternative discourse writing without translation. Presumably her stance according to her literacy narrative is that her Spanish identity can never be separated from her English identity since both represent who she is and her worldview. In the same way that English in her piece is not translated in order to appear ordinary and accepted, she does not translate Spanish so that it may appear as the norm. At least one or two of my students always give this answer to this question in the two years that I have used this piece. In another chapter in the *Norton* titled “Spoken Text,” key word repetition, alliteration, parallel structure and “brevity, rhythm, recurring themes” are encouraged for student writers who may have to deliver oral presentations (535). These

¹ Amy Tan’s “Mother Tongue,” celebrating home literacy is also in the *Norton*, and Keith Gilyard’s *Rhetorical Choices: A Reader for Writers* textbook connects languages to identity development.

same techniques are what Beverly Moss, Jackie Jones Royster, and bell hooks have found to be powerful and sound elements for texts that connect themselves to the sermonizing tradition and other forms of expressivism found in their communities.²

Trimbur asks students in chapter one of his textbook to analyze their literacy event, which he defines as writing to and for the community for which the writer has a purpose or need, be it home, school, or work; his subtitles reflect these community audiences: “Writing in Everyday Life” or the “Workplace” or “School” (Trimbur, *Call to Write* 5-30). Trimbur assumes that the academic institution is not the only social context to which students are connected, but that writing has “involved [them] in relationships with people in various social contexts” (Trimbur, *Call to Write* 5). However, despite attention given to minority discourse in the composition classroom, even the most liberal of academic institutions hold that minority discourse, that is, alternative discourse or nonstandard English, is socially unacceptable to mainstream society because it lacks the power to be heard and acted upon by mainstream society and it fails to do intellectual work because it is simply unintelligible; English competency exams enshrine these two stigmas.³ The discrepancy, then, between multiculturalism and post-process theories employed in the composition classroom and the actual construction of English competency exams remains a current concern to English faculty, and most certainly, writing program administrators, for language is the root of all human interaction and

² For a definition on the transformative power of African-American rhetoric to both create “a counter-hegemonic worldview” and “to intervene on the boundaries and limitations of Standard English,” see bell hooks, 171; see also Jackie Jones Royster’s “When the First Voice You Hear” for how Standard English can frame the user unexpectedly.

³ Basil Bernstein’s sociological model of public language and formal language shows the latter to be more analytic, and socially and intellectually mobile than public discourse.

social progression and the central aspect of the whole individual in terms of positive identity development.

The Climate of Writing Assessment at William Carey University

Proficiency exams in English in colleges and universities go by a host of names, such as the English Proficiency Exam, Writing Proficiency Exam, exit exams, and rising junior exams. Whatever the title, all of them have been created in response to illiteracy and work as a means of eradicating it. However, how well students comprehend the test prompt that they read and how well they articulate their ideas on paper brings to the surface the multiple ways literacy is defined and executed. Therefore, my dissertation study investigates how well college faculty and students comprehend, discuss and define literacy and how well they execute literacy practices within the context of testing for English proficiency. Specifically, this work is a qualitative case study of how implementing and then terminating its English Proficiency Exam (EPE) affected the concept of literacy envisioned by the English faculty at William Carey University, a private Baptist institution in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

William Carey University, which opened its doors in 1906, was the first in the state to admit blacks in the 1960s, by which time it had already implemented its first EPE.⁴ William Carey currently has a combined 2010-11 enrollment of 3,626 students on its three campuses, of which 32% of the students are Black, 61% White, and 6% a combined total of Nonresident Alien, American Indian, and Unknown (IPEDS). Carey is

⁴ The actual record of the initial implementation of the EPE at Carey is no longer available and is provided by the historian on Campus, Dr. Milton Wheeler, who has contributed to a definitive history of William Carey with Donna Wheeler. In addition, the fact that Carey faculty implemented their exam to all-white students before minorities entered the institutions clearly suggests that unlike many other institutions such as Florida State University and California State University, their test was not an initial response to the English skills of their minority students.

accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) and is governed by a board of trustees elected by the Mississippi Baptist Convention (*William Carey University Catalog* 17). William Carey advocates both academic excellence and attention to diversity with its mission statement:

As a Christian university that embraces its Baptist heritage and namesake, William Carey University provides quality educational programs, within a caring Christian academic community, which challenge the individual student to excel in scholarship, leadership, and service in a diverse global society.

(“Mission Statement” 2)

Clearly, the goal of the EPE was to meet the academic standards of both SACS and the Mississippi Baptist Convention. The EPE also upheld the mission statement component of a way for students to show excellence in English scholarship. However, of the 1209 students taking the EPEs at William Carey from Fall 2005 to Summer 2008, approximately one-third (30%) of them failed the test and therefore also presumably failed to show mastery of English scholarship. Amidst questions and complaints from teachers and students as to why the test was not passed despite the test question having been answered and the oft-given answer from English faculty evaluators that the failure was due to grammar and mechanics, the results did not sit well with us. English could not be reduced to grammar and mechanical errors according to our philosophies on clarity of expression in writing, which for many of us involves taking chances, sounding ironic and even sarcastic, and presenting strong voices. Due to the high failure rate on these exams at this school and other schools, I became concerned as to why students fail on such exams in which good writing is implicitly defined in so many complex ways.

In the winter 2008 term (Carey has a trimester schedule), the exam was officially discontinued for several significant reasons: (1) the faculty believed that the test, taken in a classroom over a two-hour period, did not accurately measure all the ways students are able to articulate the English language; (2) the test did not accurately reflect the English department faculty's commitment to composition theory and in particular its valuing the process of writing and not merely the product; and (3) the chair of the English department indicated that writing is "about being creative," yet the exam rhetoric and the testing situation seemed to send a message to students that writing is formulaic (William Carey Faculty Meeting). The three reasons for termination of the EPE at Carey indicate how literacy is an ongoing process of negotiation. The three reasons are a specific response to the larger reactions of the testing climate. How English faculty perceived and framed the proficiency exam when implementing the exam, and how the students responded to literacy requirements on the test as well as their actual comments in the English 105 basic writing class they were required to take if they failed the EPE, and how faculty on campus conversed about this exam particularly, many of which faculty had disagreed with the termination when the exam came up for a university-wide vote, all show that literacy was never a static concept on this campus based on mutual agreement. Rather literacy was and still is a source of tension and confusion and is a mediated process as all parties involved are trying to work together to have their separate interests met before, during, and after writing enters the realm of high stakes testing.

This College Council votes as well as subsequent conversations between the English department and the Business, Art, and Education departments present an image of how English can be articulated, debated, and perceived in order to highlight a campus's values. Indeed, the conversations indicate how English values change rather

than remain static and that English can move from an exclusive adherence to standards of formal writing to one that includes minority ways of knowing. On the one hand, as this present study will show, William Carey University used its English Proficiency Exam to represent the absolute expression of formal college academic English. However, on the other hand, many of the English faculty, but not all, has contemplated new forms of written assessment to accommodate their diverse student population and their commitment to composition theory. Thus, the present study can provide guidance for other schools trying to revise or eradicate competency exams in English and for writing program administrators who diligently work toward expanding the dialogues about English so that more students benefit from the acquisition and mastering of languages for wider, global communication. Moreover, the Carey English faculty has been asked by their College Council to create a new form of assessment that defines and measures writing more accurately than the traditional skills-based EPE, so my dissertation also analyzes how any form of standards can possibly remain if we accept a position that seeks to accommodate diversity. Specifically, they are handling questions such as: As test administrators, are we now to deem proficient and pass students who use both the English language and their home discourses? Or do we grade for a basic knowledge of English and writing, which all students are expected to have on the college level, and inform students that we acknowledge nonstandard discourses and that we will discuss with them when and when not to use nonstandard discourses, but that for this particular new form of test measurement—whether it be a portfolio, capstone course, or senior presentation—students must write using the standard?

My interest in English Competency Exams is due to my role as both alumnae and faculty member in the English Department at William Carey University on its main campus in

Hattiesburg, Mississippi.⁵ The students at all three campuses were required until early 2008 to take the EPE in order to graduate. I went through the same process during my senior year at Carey. I remember telling myself then that as an English major, I could not possibly fail this test—or could I? I had anxiety about the exam because I kept wondering what they would look for in order for me to pass. I also recall that the closer the test day came, the more I resolved that if I failed that test, I would change my major.

Over a decade later, when I became a teacher in Carey's English department, I heard the same kind of anxiety from my students. However, whereas I questioned whether I would actually graduate with a degree in English, some students who have failed the exam have gone so far as to question whether they belong in college at all. Dealing with their fears of being bad writers as they prepared for the exam or after receiving their scores was already hard, but telling them what was expected from them on the test was even more difficult. I often found myself telling them to follow the directions and to answer directly the question that was being asked of them. I began to suspect that my vague directives were not helpful, and so I began to redirect the questions to myself and other teachers in my department: What do we expect from them? How do we convey what we expect, and do we convey it clearly? What are their expectations for us? And even more fundamentally, just how is the EPE defining for us and for our students what College English is?

Nowhere is the tension between skills and process more apparent than in the English Proficiency Exam situation in college classrooms. Before the English Proficiency Exam was discontinued at William Carey, I was a test reader for its last two years along with

⁵ There are also two branch campuses, one in Gulfport, Mississippi, and another, a nursing school, in New Orleans, Louisiana.

the entire English department's full-time faculty. Based on the grading rubric that accompanied the exam and the notion that rhetoric is the act of persuasion, I tried to read the exams from a rhetorical standpoint. What were the test writers saying to my colleagues and me in an attempt to persuade us? I found that the feedback from their tests which can mirror the instruction that we teach (White, *Assigning* 101; O'Neil 59) suggests that academic discourse in English appears as an absolute concept to both successful students and failing ones. What I found repeatedly on the tests were replications of how they perceived Standard English at the college level. Ironically, in a university environment where academics are expected to move effortlessly between their own specialized discourses to those between disciplines for joint projects, committee work, and team teaching, I was disappointed in the ways that students taking these exams were interpreting academic discourse in English as being based both on skills and personal narrative without any political, discipline-specific, or alternative discourse writing. In fact, the ways that students were limiting what academic discourse could be is the reason I became interested in how definitions of academic discourse affect assessment outcomes, and I would argue, based on my research, on an analysis of English Proficiency Exams, and on a qualitative case study of William Carey faculty, that there is a direct link between the separation that is made between skills and content in English departments, a separation often endorsed by outside faculty and administrators and questionable assessment outcomes. Indeed, any curricular reform in writing movements on college campuses should specify, as an institutional requirement, an agreement among departments, spearheaded by the English department as to what academic English conventions are similar in each department and which ones are different. The questions that I and some of the other English teachers were asking and the anxiety levels of the

students show that these tests are high stakes, because through them knowledge about English is constructed, transmitted, interpreted and interrupted to create new ways of practicing English in the academic environment. In short, there is a battle going on when cultural-pluralist teachers and students sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously approach the same proficiency test as traditional teachers and students and when both sides view their forms of college English as preferable. I would even argue that if students write outside of traditional boundaries by wanting to perform creative language play or because they do not understand that only minimum competency performances are being asked for, they may have been rewarded for this behavior in the classroom, but they often are not rewarded but rather failed for such mannerisms on these exams. Their failure indicates the debate over whether the English Proficiency Exam should measure minimum competency, maximum competency, or a combination exists and such tensions cause mixed messages to the entire campus community as to what College English is. The exam also unearths a larger debate within the field of whether our job as instructors is solely to maintain and teach current-traditional pedagogy or to work to provide our students with postmodern, post-process, and alternative discourse methodology. Although most composition teachers merge both teaching practices in their classrooms, the proficiency exam highlights the fact that teachers strongly practice a dichotomy on the exam when they prioritize form over content. Granted, proficiency exam grading rubrics for holistic scoring, analytic scoring, and primary trait scoring and portfolios do explain to students to a degree what type of control they should exhibit over their writing in order to pass, but these same rubrics also seem to encourage multiculturalism. And if students from classrooms that practice polysemic discourse and expressiveness should fail, does this not mean that the rubric is being read from a

Standard English Only viewpoint despite the fact that test assessment's purpose is measuring student learning by replicating course instruction? For the sake of the students who do not do well on English Proficiency Exams and the teachers and administrators who are perplexed by the scores and often the test itself does not mirror their instruction, we must ask ourselves if such tests are looking for the same type of student autonomy as we do in our classrooms. Another way to see this point is to ask: What does *proficiency* mean? And if student test-takers have to know so explicitly how teachers will grade proficiency exams, would this not mean that they are really being tested on how well they know and function within the climates of their own local academic institutions rather than how well they can handle written English in general?

The limitations of proficiency exams become known when student disruptions in the form of resistance occur on the tests. When students write outside of what teacher-graders expect, then I believe that we can begin to see and articulate how the definitions of English and writing are not stable or agreed upon values and that competency defined as standardized, basic competency, and balanced expression on such an exam is often redefined in multiple ways by student test-takers. Moreover, when teachers and administrators no longer perform the routine test and instead reflect on what the test tried to do, another disruption also takes place. The test that had the power to assess is now being assessed, and as such, as compositionist Bob Broad says about reenvisioning written assessments, that the "net effect" of questioning validity theory's focus on formal writing has caused a "shift [in] attention to the broad impact of assessments on teaching and learning and to judge the appropriateness of assessments based on the outcomes of high-stakes decisions affecting students' lives" ("What We Value" 11). In other words, by not equating test validity with only formalism, college English teachers,

administrators, and researchers are at work to see the limits of validity that can hinder successful writing. Whereas, the test was business as usual, making such discussions of what English could be canceled, conversations analyzing the exams make new forms of English visible and less threatening. Moreover, the ways in which evaluators and students can read the language of testing from these two vastly different viewpoints, Standard English and Alternative (home) Discourse, also call into question the often fixed notions of classic test theory: reliability, rubric scores, grading and error.⁶ Indeed, the nonstandard manner in which some students approach this exam by the way they read it and write for it, as well as how teachers or testing firms design, talk about, and respond to these exams informs the theory and practice of writing. First, nonstandard writing on an English proficiency test challenges the current-traditional idea in the field of Rhetoric and Composition that formal writing implies the use of Standard English Only. Second, despite the fact that students bring their second languages or nonstandard dialects to English Proficiency Exams as agents of their own writing and experiences, the language of standardization is so restrictive that these student approaches will be penalized with a low pass, if not failed. Third, standardization language also restricts the most liberal of teachers, who are often the test designers, to the point that their pedagogical practice toward multicultural language usage in their classroom can have no place on the exam. This dissertation, therefore, explores to what degree written assessment, particularly proficiency exams, positions teachers, administrators, students and other stakeholders as gatekeepers of Standard Academic English, and how and why critics of standards have created valuable alternative forms for these formal tests. The forms may work as an

⁶ Frances Zak and Christopher Weaver explain that the English classroom may be process-based, but grading is product-based as are, as Huot claims, grading rubrics for proficiency exam testing, 88-89.

option for the test-taker.

This introduction has discussed how test rhetoric with its focus on classic validity and reliability defines academic literacy at its most elemental level. Moreover, the definition of college English as Standard English Only within the genre of testing often restricts the local values of the institutions that are trying to assess student learning in composition classrooms and program quality. A conscious effort on the part of composition scholars to interrogate and destabilize the normalizing features of proficiency test rhetoric is an effective way to more closely correlate the various ways academic English is encouraged and practiced in composition classrooms and to emphasize the commitment the Rhetoric and Composition field has toward process and social constructivist theories.

In the following chapters, I juxtapose the values for English that academic institutions tend to uphold to what these tests actually measure. Chapter II reviews how standardized testing in English historically and theoretically has been normalized and works as a pervasive discourse. This chapter also sets forth a methodology for discourse analysis of the Carey faculty conversations on writing testing. Chapter III finds, through the conversations of Carey faculty both inside and outside the English Department that despite composition teachers' best efforts to forward expressivistic rhetoric for maximum competency results, test language and design and the messages they send to both student test-takers and outside faculty can thwart the best of these intentions. Proficiency exams also extend the message of traditionalism that Academic English is absolute, a message that counters the very real work done in composition classrooms on the legitimacy of languages as functional, productive, and persuasive. Chapter IV shows how teachers and students value and try to maintain standards while also working toward constructing

individual or departmental identities for written test assessments. The fragile and almost schizophrenic nature of writing to standards and culture uncovers just how difficult and often detrimental grade-wise such terms are within English departments and the larger academic institutions. For example, several students try to bring non-standard discourse into EPEs, but they often fail in their attempt because test graders read both culture and standards as separate, stand-alone entities. This phenomenon of failure happens on these exams even after students have been encouraged to participate in multiple-literacy practices in the classroom, and they assume the test is in place to assess whether or not they have mastered persuasion by the most effective means. Thus, the rhetoric of testing and the testing environment subsumes almost all cultural personas. Chapter V discusses how redefining validity and reliability through Writing Across the Curriculum initiatives may permit us to more easily see, understand, and measure for cultural ways of knowing. Cultural differences can be part of standards—those accepted and agreed upon objectives and expectations that value diverse epistemologies.

CHAPTER II

MEASURING LEARNING THROUGH THE CONTEXT OF STUDENT AGENCY

The text [holistically scored essay exams] does not admit alternative discourses conceptually or pragmatically: it's text as correct answer.

---Kathleen Yancy, *Looking Back as We Look Forward: Historicizing Writing Assessment* (1999)

This literature review shows how student agency has been valued in written test assessment. Both the theory and practice in the current field of Rhetoric and Composition have defined the self mainly as a cultural self who can bring to the writing experience multiple discourses, dialect or nonstandard English, and cultural expressions. This chapter charts how written assessment has complicated the concept of culture in Writing Studies. In order to define culture, I use anthropologist Clifford Geertz's view of culture as "webs of significance" and "meaning-making as the locus of culture" (5). I also add to the definition of culture what compositionist Keith Gilyard calls a "working definition" of ethnicity supplied by Joseph Hraba (1974) as "self-conscious collectivities of people, who on the basis of a common origin or a separate subculture, maintain a distinction between themselves and outsiders" (*Rhetoric* vi). Moreover, to impose culture on ethnic groups by outsiders is to practice essentialism, which changes the narratives of their realities; the better method is to let individuals acknowledge and verbalize their own cultural affiliations (*Rhetoric* vi)⁷. However, culture is a non-point of reference for student test writing, which is a devaluation of culture, as Kathleen Yancy says, both conceptually and pragmatically (483-485). Alternative non-standard discourses do not fit the concept of good writing on a proficiency exam that explicitly

⁷ For the different ways this issue has been addressed, see Gilyard for an autobiographical position in *Voices of the Self: A Study of Language Competence*, and Shirley Brice Heath for her ethnographic view of Tracton in *Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms*.

requires students to use Standard English. She also is correct that in a practical sense evaluators would find it difficult to ever read, comprehend, and grade in a timely and cost-efficient manner different dialects of English and various cultural references. However, since the field has continued to align itself more closely with cultural studies research about diversity and writing, Yancy's statement can challenge us to see how non-Standard English might fit the exam conceptually and pragmatically. What is of most concern, however, is that even with our enlightened awareness of over forty years of exposure to the claim that student has the right to his or her own language, fitting this ideology into the mold of a proficiency exam most often associated with Standard English and a nationalistic identity is still quite problematic for those writing administrators who give and read the exam and for the students who take the risk to individualize such an exam.

Student Agency and Written Assessment

From 1950-1970 the classic test principle of reliability drove both written test assessment and the field of Composition Studies. Kathleen Yancy explains that when it began in 1950, the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) was entrenched in multiple-choice objective testing, as indicated by CCCC articles and workshops describing the "usefulness" or value of objective tests as a way to be reliable (consistently fair in scoring), aligned with the reliability standards valued in other disciplines on campus, and compliant with the "endorsements of national grading standards" (485). In itself, reliability is an effective standard, because all students should be scored by the same rubrics for the same kind of work. Objective tests in composition that measure grammar, mechanics, and vocabulary meet the standard of reliability because such tests have correct answers. However, Yancy questions the quality of this

indirect measure of testing, not only because such tests measure behavior related to actual writing yet not the actual behavior of writing itself (486), but also because with her description of reliability and testing and her reflection on the selves who take these tests, she begs the question of whether the reliable student self can be described. In other words, how does the student meet the reliability standard in order to give administrators and teachers the statistical correlations they need for the placement of students in English programs? According to Yancy, “During the first wave of writing assessment, the *tested self* of course took very narrow forms. In multiple-choice tests, the self is a passive, forced-choice response to an external expert’s understanding of language conventions. Agency is neither desired nor allowed” (499). The individual, cultural self is non-existent in this form of testing since the goal is sameness in answers without difference in thinking, a logic that is valued when students write extended prose. Many scholars have resisted objective testing for its lack of individualized cultural voice/agency/thinking (O’Neil, Moore, and Huot 38; Lynne 17-43).⁸

The next form of assessment that became popular was holistically scored essay exams which directly measures student writing. Yancy charts this rise in a more subjective assessment from 1970-1986 (486). She explains that those in the field of Composition Studies at this time are finding that writing in their classrooms involves more than correct grammar and usage, but that writing is a form of expression of one’s thinking. Thus, in order to measure how a student puts ideas together, essay tests were devised and the focus in the field shifted from reliability to validity, which is that the test

⁸ In the first twenty years of the *Research in the Teaching of English Journal*, literary scholar, Anne Herrington says the issue of the validity of testing had caused a split between research scholars and teachers of English and composition. See also the CCCC position statement on writing assessment.

must measure the exact instruction that goes on in the classroom (Yancy 489). Thus, she cites six reasons for the movement to essay tests with one being that open admissions caused faculty to see “new and other kinds of students” and so faculty noted an “obvious discrepancy between what they did with their students in class and what students were then asked to do on tests (qtd. in White, *Teaching and Assessing*) and so teaching became diverse (1191). The other reasons for some colleges to start using essay exams, although even today multiple-choice proficiency exams have not been discontinued in some schools, was that compositionists now “[know] more about writing: about the writing process, about teaching writing process, about writing courses and what they might look like, about what composition studies might be” (White, *Teaching and Assessing* 1191).

At William Carey University, some students had more agency over their writing on this type of test, but because these exams were high-stakes of placement or exit, students had to understand that risk-taking in writing would be to their disadvantage. One hour exams or timed tests and one essay written at a testing site limited students from using alternative discourse patterns on these exams or spending time to reflect and write or rely on the notion that writing is a recursive process. In other words, revision is not emphasized on this exam, but rather short pre-writing is encouraged just to help students get their thoughts down. Pre-writing test booklets I have reviewed have worked as notes for students as they take the timed test or as space for an entire first draft that is written over almost verbatim, just more legibly. Agency is also limited due to the scoring rubric that students see while they are writing their timed test. Although the rubric explains the boundaries of what students can write in order to pass, they still may not understand the rubric in order to meet the expectations of the test.

Yancy explains the valid self:

During the second wave, the self becomes a producer—of a holistically scored essay—and thus an agent who creates text. Still, there is less agency there than it appears. The text that is created is conventionally and substantively determined—some might say overdetermined—by an expert who constrains what is possible, by creating the prompt, designing the scoring guide used to evaluate the text, training the readers who do the scoring. Given these constraints, the authorship of such a text is likely to be a static, single-voiced self who can only anticipate and fulfill the expert’s expectations, indeed whose task is to do just that (qtd. in Sullivan). At best, agency is limited: a self-in-writing is permitted, but it is a very limited self, with very circumscribed agency. (499)

Peter Elbow also stresses how the expert teacher-grader is likewise constrained by validity standards in the way that he or she reads the student exam. Using Louise Rosenblatt’s notion of Transactional Theory (that readers construct meaning from texts based on “their own diverse value”), Elbow claims that scoring guides that ask for group evaluation and consensus produce evaluators with circumscribed agency (“Writing Assessment” 121). Specifically, he states, “The high rates of reader agreement...do not reflect the way the readers’ value texts but only how they rate them under special conditions with constraining rules” (Elbow, “Writing Assessment” 121). Such limitations in agency can lead to less than accurate writing and reading performances for both teacher-graders and student test-takers and is the reason Elbow calls for an end to holistic scoring that results in a single numerical grade. Instead, Elbow encourages the use of the portfolio method with a minimal holistic scoring criteria of “excellent” or

“poor” and no middle-range scores, so that the student writer is judged for diverse performances and so that teacher-graders have to justify their excellent or poor rating with feedback defining what they mean rather than by using a number linked to a general rubric (“Writing Assessment” 123-125). In both the arguments made by Yancy and Elbow, the concepts associated with large-scale written assessment of “authentic student writing,” with the test as an “accurate reflection of the writer,” and with a “true writing situation” are now questionable at best, calling for serious re-evaluation of what single numerical scoring says about testing institutions.

The form of assessment that is most popular today (1986 to the present) is the portfolio assessment. This form of testing allows for multiple discourses in a single student portfolio. Extensive revision with teacher commentary as part of a dialogue between teacher and student as collaborative writing, and extensive student reflection in order to find creative ways to meet audience need when getting ideas across accompanies portfolio writing. Yancy explains that this is the type of self that compositionists should want to teach. Although this method meets the validity standard of measure, its reliability has been questioned. Compositionist Bob Broad says such large-scale written assessments are unreliable when we “equate interpreter disagreement with ‘unfairness’” (“Portfolio Scoring” 266). He argues that if the field has moved from multiple-choice testing to single essay testing to portfolio assessment, we are saying that we value the writing process and the meaning-making interaction between teacher-student dialogue about student papers as substantial in our comprehension and evaluation of the finished product. However, if the portfolio is reduced to a reliability standard in the form of a number in a range from 1-6, then the meaning making and feedback from teachers is lost and we are, in a circular sense, reenacting the goals and values of objective testing.

Broad explains this contradiction:

We've abandoned the effort to make students' writing the same in favor of letting students make the differences among them into resources for writing. So difference and context are transvalued from 'confounding variables' (as in the discourse of psychometrics) into useful, stimulating elements in the process of evaluating writing to assigning a number which strips context and quashes difference. ("Portfolio Scoring" 266)

Thus, the need to judge proficiency according to a very stylized rubric with a criterion may not represent how all teachers define good versus bad papers. Broad highlights this interpretive community as consisting of "rhetoricians, literary types, Africanists, Marxists, feminists, creative writers, technical writers, New Critics, New Historicists, grammarians, expressivists, graduate students, adjuncts, and tenured faculty" and questions how their theoretical leanings can possibly permit them to think the same if they are a *true* community" ("Portfolio Scoring" 266). His true community seems to be one that has shared beliefs but one that also allows for difference, so that the community expands in knowledge, grows in awareness, and progresses on multiple levels.

Ultimately, Broad says holistic scoring on portfolios goes beyond the classroom and holistic scoring session to larger issues of culture and politics. When teacher-graders present themselves as experts on a single, correct way to write, students are in less than a democratic culture ("Portfolio Scoring" 273). Of course, the English teacher's job is to provide expertise, but should such expertise be used to lead or accompany the student writer? With holistic scoring, the student writer is viewed as a learner capable of being labeled a skilled writer but not capable of being seen as one who is willing to move into the interpretative community of teachers as an equal. Broad's argument, then—that

“post-positivist methods of written assessment” or “position, situated, located assessment,” which values difference in written feedback that can actually be shown to students after the exam to help them with learning—is a more accurate reflection of a democratic rather than autocratic state (“Portfolio Scoring” 273, 271). The image of a democratic state suggests an invitation by academic institutions of bringing students into a community of writers in the same ways that teachers and scholars interact when writing.

Another way to see just how difficult it is for scholars and teachers to place student agency comfortably in written test assessment is to view how strangely theory is separated from practice in order to justify a democratic state. A case example is that in a 1986 CCC article, Patricia Bizzell shows that she follows the theoretical tenets of the William Perry model for liberal education. This model consists of students learning that concepts are not absolutes, but rather all issues are neither all good nor all wrong or not every issue is black or white. Their job is to learn to interrogate absolute stances: “The liberal arts college, instead of accepting such naïve dependence on Absolutes, requires the comparative study of ideas as the only way to choose among competing standards, to arrive at an informed judgment” (Bizzell, “What Happens” 298). Here students begin to believe that absolute statements do not fit all people in all times and space, and so students learn to make qualifications for these statements that fit their own personal needs. They also learn to compromise, that is, take the best from both worlds of “competing standards” and use their new concept to fit their audiences and purposes as well as their own needs. What is important here is that Bizzell explains that college campuses value the Socratic Method of learning, which is that students should not take ideas at face value but rather should be encouraged to question, debate, and make

knowledge with others, and after such an induction-deduction process they then have the reasoning behind the informed decision, the singular judgment statement about their subject that they must make and be able to argue for and support on paper. Indeed, the fact that composition teachers want students to choose a debatable topic that they then explain in order to forward a conclusive judgment statement on a particular side is at the heart of composition classrooms and fits well with what evaluators measure on proficiency exams. However, in 1987, Bizzell abandons her theoretical stance when she believes a student has failed a proficiency exam unjustly.

In Bizzell's review of major scholarly publications on testing, she points out that the books, with the exception of Lester Faigley's, do not address the social issues of testing, but rather the methodological issues (Review: "What Can We Know" 575). In order to explain her position, she gives as her example a controversy that happened over the CUNY Writing Assessment Test. Judith Summerfield who teaches at Queens College/CUNY, determined that a student failed the test because as she stated, she could not make up her mind about the test topic. The student takes a middle of the road position on a test where students are asked "to write an essay in 50 minutes in which they frame an argument to 'agree to disagree' with some statement on modern life" (Bizzell, Review: "What Can We Know" 582). Summerfield was concerned that the test represented dichotomized thinking, a concept that she believes the institution should not indicate that they value (Bizzell, Review: "What Can We Know" 582). Bizzell, then, who previously advocated the Perry Model of Commitment to a single informed opinion, now admonishes Summerfield for not directly solving the problem of this test by presumably changing the example to allow for more reflective, open-ended test responses. Bizzell's response to Summerfield's actions indicates the totally mixed

messages students receive from college instruction, say if the student were in a William Perry or Socratic classroom, and how they should perform on proficiency exams. However, what is equally hard to fathom is why a test elicits a different standard of instruction and fairness than what Bizzell advocates should go on in a classroom. Her response could indicate that she has changed in her thinking from one year to the next, but Bizzell has always championed the cause of the democratic classroom from “What Happens When Basic Writers Come to College?” (1992) to *ALT DIS: Alternative Discourse and the Academy* (2002), so this cannot be the underlying reason for her separation of theory and practice. What may be a closer interpretation of Bizzell’s comments as well as the turnabout comments of other scholar-teachers is that she is so resistant to a high-stakes exam that seeks conformity and sameness in agency rather than individuality that in order to fight against the monolith that is the test she is willing to reject her own call for conformity to the Perry-modeled classroom. Rather than acknowledge that she has taken the same stance in the past as Summerfield has with the testing situation, she creates a division, which may show not only that written assessment has produced an internal battle within herself, but also that the idea that theory and practice can and should work together is compromised when it comes to testing in English. She admonishes Summerfield below without finding ways to allow for both the Perry Model and middle of the road thinking in her classroom and on proficiency exams:

A test that requires dichotomizing, then, may not only unfairly penalize the less well educated, those who don’t know how to ‘make up’ a mind that has seized one side of an ambiguous question, to pretend in writing that they hold a position about which they are really unsure. It may also unwisely discourage students who have progressed beyond

dichotomizing in their ability to entertain typically reflective, question-posing academic habits of mind.

Moreover, [Summerfield] briefly mentions but does not really deal with students whose problem is not that they haven't learned to dichotomize, or that they are too sophisticated to do so, but that they do not want to learn to apply academic habits of mind, dichotomizing or not, to certain issues. (Bizzell, "Review: What Can We Know" 583)

Bizzell suggests that writing is more a creative and contemplative process when students negotiate their idea of what is good writing by making a valid argument that fits with their worldview rather than the views that evaluators seem to hold that fit with prescriptive testing. However, in the very dichotomizing Bizzell herself is doing, she shows that such binaries come at a cost, which in her case is a disconnect between theory and practice. In a similar sense, the student who also dichotomizes between a singular answer and a middle-of-the-road position also separates theory and practice. Because she chose to follow the wrong theory and practice from the institution where her test is given, conceivably she would now have to divorce herself from her conception of good writing and accept Summerfield and her colleagues' conception of good writing in order not to be penalized by them if she were given a chance to retest a second time.

A second example of the split for teachers between theory and practice that this proficiency test causes, one which makes it so much harder for a student to be confident that his or her agency is valued on such a test, is described in the research of college English teacher Carmen Kynard of St. John's University in New York. In Kynard's article "Writing while Black: The Colour Line, Black Discourses and Assessments in the Institutionalization of Writing Instruction," she describes how in her freshman writing

course she taught students to avoid fragments, run-on sentences, comma splices and other grammatical issues (10). She stresses these conventions since her students must take an exit exam, the IFE or Institutional Freshman Exam, which will be read by other English faculty in order to pass her course. She tells her students up front that she will not follow the “content of the course, number of essay assignments, and required textbook” so that she will presumably focus more on teaching grammatical correctness (10). This framework, then, works as her theoretical position. However, she also combines her beliefs in grammar with her belief in student diversity and their right to write about their own political views. Kynard’s student, Jamiyla, takes the exam and opts not to sound radical in her political views but rather she chooses to write a grammatically correct but distant paper. She is rewarded by the evaluators as having a passing test, and she receives an A- for the course. What is perplexing here is the way Kynard frames Jamiyla whose writing she calls a “hustle,” and it is “absolutely clean...like clean-machine, typewriter-ish handwriting” and “oppositional and resistant” because Jamiyla refuses to “think,” so therefore her writing is “simplistic” (14-15). The heaviest criticism Kynard levels at Jamiyla is that if the test were an AP test given to high schoolers, thinking would have been required, but since the IFE is given to “working-class, college students of African descent,” then the standards have been lowered (15). The other two students in her case study that she uses to contrast testing experiences get framed in a more positive light with one being called “poetic” and the other said to “layer in” his text, and clearly, Kynard appreciates their subject matter, which is a resistance to British imperialism (16, 19). Kynard, like Bizzell, divorces herself from her own theoretical stance on traditionalism in order to resist what she perceives is a discriminatory test. However, in the process of leveling her criticism at the test, which is her real target instead of Jamiyla,

the student loses agency. All the students took what they needed from Kynard's class in order to write for the exam. Jamiyla chose to take away her grammar lessons, and the other two students chose to focus on content. By choosing to write a grammatically correct paper with good organizational structure and a reluctance to criticize imperial rule, she is cast as not thinking. But the fact that she carves out a passive, distant persona, I would argue, shows that she is thinking about her goals for writing and her audience in as much the same ways as the other two students. However, her sense of agency that tells her to reject difference and write in the role of sameness and conformity gets cast as a "hustle," but while the other two who are telling it "like it is" in order to mark their ethnic identities are not performing a hustle. Why? Jamiyla's conscious choice is an act of agency that represents her idea of the academic cultural self, but Kynard's views of the test as offering multiple self-identities actually limits the freedom she advocates when she disavows an academic identity of the traditional/conventional, which should be one such choice.

Colleges and universities across the country have found the need to measure English proficiency by testing for precision and balance following in the tradition of Harvard University, and many institutions do this testing despite the fact that they also question whether the test is an accurate measurement of the instruction in college composition on their campuses. Teachers seem to be in agreement on why competency tests in English are given to students: teachers want students to have the language of power and business so that they can be successful in any classroom and later in the workforce. Historically, in the 1940s, college officials tried to level the playing field for World War II war veterans, and in the 1960s to create the same atmosphere for minorities during the height of the Civil Rights Movement. Neither group had access to forms of literacy used in

academic institutions, but by giving students the same skills so no one was left behind, the ideal of equal access in education was at work (Solley 43). The same idea of equal access found its way on to standardized written competency exams. According to Edward White in *Assigning, Responding, and Evaluating: A Writing Teacher's Guide*, teachers were able to tell what type of student they were getting by giving them placement tests, and whether they were growing according to university standards with proficiency tests. Consequently, these tests told students what the university and the writing program expected of them, and what they would have to do to improve (White, *Assigning* 107). Therefore, in theory, proficiency tests place students on their correct academic level so that they can be remediated if needed in order to eventually catch up and be equal to the person with the appropriate classification and matching academic level.

The equal access to education and the traditionalist argument that Standard English is the language inscribed with power is the reasoning behind the design of the proficiency exam with the concomitant conclusion that academic conventions must be required of all students writing final papers. Conservative test theorists carry over the same traditional sentiment, since they believe that to tamper with the reliability standard so as to see negotiation and meaning making on proficiency exams as part of student learning places students at a disadvantage. This position of propriety and form over content comes to the forefront when scholars talk about what role, if any, nonstandard English should play in the English classroom.

Educator Lisa Delpit finds there is no room in the composition classroom for nonstandard English. Centering her argument on black students in particular, her work *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom* (1995) applies to any minority

using nonstandard English. She says that the writing process approach introduced by Donald Graves with his emphasis on content over form has caused teachers to have to choose between teaching skills that traditional classrooms inculcate and teaching fluency that liberal classrooms follow (Delpit 6-7). The self, then, under her paradigm is situated between the often-contentious debates over skills versus process. Delpit was herself an open classroom teacher, following in the tradition of the expressivists such as Peter Elbow, Donald Murray, and Ken Macor. However, after talking to black teachers and seeing that her black students in the first-grade classroom were not learning well or at the same pace as her white students, she began to prioritize skills over fluency. She says that students are already fluent in their own home language, but that they come to school to learn the skills that will give them the access and opportunity that the “culture of power” provides. This culture of power, she says, is peopled by the employers and academic institutions that view Standard English as the language of choice. To focus on fluency, then, is to ignore the fact that black students are already on an advanced level of being expressive and that the focus on fluency takes valuable time away from giving them the tools needed to survive in the larger society beyond their home communities. What is important here is that Delpit does not work outside of the contradiction she perceives in writing process theory. Moreover, although she stresses that there is a value and beauty in Black English, a language she speaks, she says one cannot be at the “bottom” and wish to address mainstream society using ethnic expressions in the hope that society will actually hear what the speaker or writer says. Therefore, her students becoming fluent in English are the only way for them to come out on top. Once they are in a position of power, where she claims to be now as a professor, they can become political agitators on and off campus, although she never says they should seek pluralism (Delpit 18-20). As a

person in power, professor Delpit still does not use Black English in the analytical parts of her text. She only analyzes examples of Black English provided by her students.

In “Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing,” Maxine Hairston is in accord with Delpit. Hairston identifies teaching skills as our primary obligation to students by insisting that the composition classroom is apolitical. She thinks composition teachers should keep their political views outside of the classroom, since the nature of the job itself makes the teachers authority figures, and so teachers would unduly influence students to share in their politics. For example, a liberal argument pointing out the social injustice found in the political agenda of right-wingers is the type of discourse that does not have a place in writing classrooms (Hairston 668). The form and function of Standard English as an absolute would not be discussed in these composition classrooms. What is left in such classrooms is the sharing of ideas, multiculturalism where diversity is uncontested and rather celebrated, and the writing itself, which means an emphasis on skills: “Writing courses, especially required freshman courses, should not be for anything or about anything other than writing itself, and how one uses it to learn and think and communicate” (Hairston 659). The assumption that Hairston makes is that language and writing are politically neutral enterprises, which they are not. Even more troubling is the notion that students who write in order to learn how to write, as Hairston calls for, still have to select topics that they know something about, and if what they know about is highly politicized they would, under her curriculum, be restricted from choosing such a topic, a censorship which is itself political. That same year (1985) when Hairston started drawing conclusions about the misguided work of political, leftist radicals (for instance, James Berlin), the characteristics of a politically neutral classroom and generic testing

were being described by David Bleich, Patricia Bizzell, and David Bartholomae. In “Inventing the University,” David Bartholomae instructs teachers on how students can become professionals in the university. Students have to learn that the field of English has a discourse just as other majors have their own specialized discourses (589). In order to gain access to those who use Standard English, a student must gain an understanding and mastery of “the assumptions and expectations of the field”—those cultural assumptions or “commonplaces,” that will allow her to be heard (590, 592). He suggests students take on the role “of an authority whose authority is rooted in scholarship, analysis, and research” (591) and know that a framework for a discipline includes “its own key terms (‘practical knowledge,’ ‘disciplinary guidelines,’ and ‘original ideas’), with its own agenda and with its own investigative procedures” (607). These commonplaces as a rubric for writing may be helpful for students who practice critical inquiry for their topics, but they may become stifling for students who associate such language as “key terms,” “practical knowledge,” “scholarship,” and so on with empirical writing, which they can then take to mean very stylized and distant written products.⁹

Many of the EPE writers demonstrate the commonplaces on the tests. However, those who fail often misappropriate the university, not due to a lack of knowledge of the terminology in the composition discipline, which Bartholomae begins to offer as the reason for misappropriation. However, they may not know how to generate their own voice within such a tightly constructed or rigid frame, which is the essential point that

⁹ Compositionist Michael Dubison also emphasizes that it is our interest and our values that cause students to disown text, that is they “put distance between themselves and their writing” (102).

Bartholomae makes for us.¹⁰ These students may know the meaning of *process pedagogy* as well as *product pedagogy*. However, the results can be very distant sounding texts that are accurate and passing, albeit often with teacher verbal and written complaints for lack of voice, or they are both distant and error-ridden, in which case they fail. Academic discourse, then, is viewed by these writers as a not only skill in standard grammar and mechanics, but also skill in a standard discourse structure.

What is interesting about Bartholomae's position is that he does not explain to the Rhetoric and Composition community how academic scholars who reside in the university that they invent for students as politically neutral nevertheless also create works that are political, if not outright controversial. Students who are learning to become academic scholars will also write political pieces. The political for Bartholomae, then, is defined as including the social and institutional systems that allow academics, but not students, to express themselves politically. This hierarchical system oppresses the lower class, since an awareness of how language creates and maintains racism, sexism, or classism is left out of the classroom. Rather, in a politically neutral, conservative, traditional classroom, the polite student writer masters form by using the language of the discourse community and then presenting his angle by giving a new, original idea about the subject matter that pushes research further because it is a valid argument:

The argument is a more powerful one; and I mean 'powerful' in the political sense, since it is an argument that complicates a 'naïve'

¹⁰ William Carey stresses that we use the terminology of our fields so that students learn to speak the same language, however, as Bartholomae indicates, speaking is not enough because they lack the experience of "living" the words of which they speak. In other words, they do not have enough ways to apply the terminology of specialized language or discipline-specific writing structures in order to know when it is expected and to what degree.

assumption (it makes scholarly work possible, in other words), and it does so in terms that come close to those used in current academic debates.

(Bartholomae 606)

Politics, in the way Bartholomae defines it, is a very consensual enterprise whereby members of the academic discourse community have a free exchange of ideas that is not emotionally- charged, but rather rationally-based. Moreover, the academic institution, in the role of a paternal hegemony, is not questioned or challenged as to the possible problems that may arise when the characteristics of a model discourse form of writing occurs in the classroom as a false-conscious response to politics in accord with the creation being promulgated by the institution of an apolitical student.

Composition scholar Gilyard addresses Delpit and other conservative traditionalists in his article, “African American in Process,” explaining that writing process theory is being narrowly defined and must be conceived in a broader light, one whereby nonstandard dialect can be squarely situated in the composition classroom. First, he claims that scholars who debate the process-product issue should only do so by “specifying the tenets of such instruction” (Gilyard “African Americans” 89). The tenets of process theory that Gilyard recommends are that skills are taught within the context of the student’s own fluency in his own language while also providing the student with “models of writing,” which informs the student that one’s home language is not the only way to write (90). Thus, the dichotomy that product theorists create should not exist because both skills and fluency should co-exist to create the best product. Moreover, when Delpit and her black teacher confidantes say that students are already fluent in their own home language, Gilyard explains that such an overgeneralization overlooks the fact that not all students are fluent in Black English just because they are

black. Moreover, if fluency were reconceived as a skill in a skills-based class under Delpit's paradigm, would they be given a chance to become even more fluent in their language patterns in order to make their language more understandable to outsiders if they were working on skills? Gilyard charges such separatist reasoning as racialized:

Essentializing occurred when it was claimed [by Delpit] that all African American students were already fluent and that work on fluency functioned in opposition to needed work on skills. That African American children wrote elaborate rap songs is cited as proof of the fluency they possessed. Ignored is the reality that fluency is relative to tasks and modes of discourse. People may exhibit different degrees of fluency in different genres. Operationalizing fluency is, in fact, a skill....

One more word about raps. Students can write them in school, a notion not forwarded by Delpit's informants but one that is consistent with item 5 [of the Zemelman and Daniels Process Paradigm]. And they can be helped to become more fluent in that activity. I don't buy the stereotype that they are all fluent rappers any more than I believe that they are all natural experts at singing, dancing, and dribbling basketballs. ("African Americans" 92)

Thus, once students are made to work on drills, which are entrenched in the social mores of nationalistic values and rules, the students' ethnic voices are often lost. Gilyard then calls on all educators to use sound research and studies to show that the cultural voice is lost when there is a skills or process dichotomy; such studies are worthy because the stakes for student identity, teacher responsibility and school accountability are high. He

warns: “To the extent that teachers pursue skills activity at the expense of writing, they function in opposition to the process paradigm.”¹¹ The pedagogical space thus created excludes a skills/process intersection. There is real reason to debate” (Gilyard, “African Americans 95).

In a critique of standard academic discourse, Patricia Bizzell states in “The Intellectual Work of ‘Mixed’ Forms of Academic Discourses” that the traditional academic discourse is “conventionalized language-using practices” that can “never be absolutely fixed in form,” “changes over time,” and has “multiple versions,” adding that “until relatively recently, ...people in the academic community have usually been male, European American, and middle or upper class” (1). The academic persona is formal, objective, questioning, and logical, but this identity is slowly starting to change in some composition circles where alternative discourses are mixing with academic ones in order to find and articulate information (“The Intellectual Work” 2). In fact, Bizzell says it is the alternative academic voice that often is the only way the speaker or writer can interrogate the subject matter in a way that would produce the best results (“The Intellectual Work” 2). And if widespread and highly respected academic journals are making use of alternative voice discourse, why is not more of this accepted in composition classrooms and in evaluative written exams?

The Pervasive Test Environment

Kathleen Yancy reports in her history of writing assessment that teachers of composition have tried to meet educational measurement standards by using holistic

¹¹ The Steven Zemelman and Harvey Daniels Process Paradigm lists 15 techniques teachers can use to permit students to use their home literacy in the classroom. Number 5, which Gilyard refers, says that students should write to a wide range of audiences, both inside and outside of school (90).

scoring on a large scale beginning in 1967. This scoring rubric represented clearly definable goals that could be understood by both teachers and students. The rubric could also be easily explained to the administration, departments, federal and state legislative bodies, and accreditation agencies. Huot, however, calls holistic scoring a return to current traditional assessment practices, and he urges the composition studies community to make writing assessment theoretical according to the principles of rhetoric and composition and the basis of many actual composition classroom instructional practices. He maintains that writing assessment can be valid and reliable as is ethically required by the fields of education and psychology while still staying current with the theories and practices of our field.

Another reason for the pervasiveness of the English proficiency test is that many faculty on campuses thought that there were disparities between the literacy attributes of transfer students and non-transfer students. Transfer students often did not meet the writing standards of four-year institutions even after receiving a degree from their community colleges, and certification in writing proficiency (White, *Assigning* 107). The disparity between the literacy standards of community colleges and four-year institutions justified making the EPE or Writing Proficiency Exam (WPE) a mandatory test for all student progress (Solley 43). But unlike standardized tests that are a large part of the public school environment whereby public schools use a norm group to compare scores between students and between schools, colleges and universities tend to use the exams in an insular sense. Colleges and universities use such exams to advocate for new writing courses within the English department, to modify existing courses, or to expand a sequence of writing courses among other disciplines as part of a Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) plan. Thus, they lean much more heavily on the latter goal of test

assessment to evaluate program effectiveness overall with the exceptions of large cross-state institutions in systems such as California and New York that do use the test to determine which schools are doing the best job (Solley 43). Thus, I would claim that the general focus on programmatic assessment is a major factor in letting discussions about test bias, language use, and institutional power go unquestioned. Indeed, many institutions merely suspect that something in the test is missing.

Despite the need for a college degree to mean the mastering of basic skills for all students and proficiency exams as a means to this end, college composition teachers often criticize these exams. Bob Broad said that such exams made his staff feel “frustrated” (“Pulling Your Hair” 214), and Dr. Richardson and several of the teachers at William Carey believed that the test was “problematic” and represented a “disconnect between what is taught in the classroom and what is being asked for on the exam” (Carey Faculty Meeting, 2009). Edward White explains that assessment can be seen as both a threat and a promise. The test is a threat when such a test “puts a premium on low-level skills that can be easily examined, through inexpensive multiple-choice tests, and readily improved by short-term learning or drill. This kind of testing may work in some fields, but it is particularly dangerous in writing and other liberal arts fields, where outcomes are complex and not necessarily manifested immediately” (White, *Teaching and Assessing* 7). What is often not manifested immediately, he tells us, is the hallmark of our profession:

The difficulty of coming up with a valid assessment of writing derives from the double role of writing as a *socializing* discipline (enforcing and confirming student membership in an educated community) and as an *individualizing* discipline (demanding critical thinking and an active

relation of the self to material under study). Although both of these functions are important, the second one is more significant for American education. That is, writing instruction becomes a liberating activity, and hence properly an essential part of the liberal arts, when it demands and rewards thinking for oneself. (White, *Teaching and Assessing* 12)

What White questions and teachers bemoan is the knowledge that we are trying to measure writing, which is subjective, with an objective measuring tool. This can be done if the test is cast as a benefit for stakeholders. White indicates that there is also the promise of assessment in that such assessments can be used to emphasize more and better revision, cause teachers to discuss writing more, and help teachers and students dialogue about writing (White, *Teaching and Assessing* 9-16). Here White seems to posit writing assessment as a form of placement, but also as an invention/discovery tool for teachers and students. I also see some merit in these tests as a way to help students understand the multi-dimensionality of English rather than as a discussion of correctness. However, the difficulty of helping students understand what White calls the “complexity” of English and what I deem the “plurality” of English is due to the closed, singular nature of the text itself. The climate that surrounds the English student test-taker defines Academic English as the Standard, an articulation of English that seems static rather than dynamic and often contrary to the actual practices going on in many college composition classrooms, which have both historical and theoretical underpinnings.

Above all the other reasons for why the test is so pervasive is the nature of testing itself. The proficiency exam is yet another test within a student culture that is accustomed to testing. Thus, the proficiency is similar in many ways to the midterm for students, that is, a test that students associate with the midway point to the final grade, a necessary fork in

the road that one must maneuver. The exam represents the midway point of academic progress displaying to the student and English department that the student has mastered basic literacy skills. They must show this mastery before they are awarded the final, which is the college degree that displays to the public that the student has mastered basic literacy skills.

However, the parameters set by standardized written test assessment invade the norm of business as usual on college campuses. These exams are large-scale involving hundreds if not thousands of students in all majors sitting for this exam, often offered two to three times in an academic year. The exams do not reside within an individual English teacher's domain, but rather communal assessment takes place where other English teachers read the test essays. Larger institutions use commercial testing agencies to score exams or computer programs to score part of the exams, such as word counts. Students are given a list of test questions from which they usually choose one or two to write about under time constraints and within a classroom turned into a test site. In an effort for students to write well, based on what their audience of test graders expect, they are usually given an evaluative criteria rubric such as a holistic, primary trait, or analytic scoring guides. The results of the test will be student placement in an upper or developmental level English course or work as an exit exam out of a course or out of college.

What can be noted during all of this serious testing in order to determine what students have learned before they graduate, and how effective course instruction and program frameworks are doing, is the discourse in English departments which surrounds the testing climate. Writing teachers, many with an educational background in Rhetoric and Composition, who do prepare these students for English Proficiency Exams (EPEs) often

find themselves no longer talking about the aims of discourse or mixing modes based upon the student's purpose for writing, student autonomy or sense of agency over his or her writing experience, process and cognitive theory, or alternative voice discourse such as teaching transgressive or queer and transsexual theory. Writing across the disciplines, which has been advocated by writing program administrator (WPA) research since the 1980s, is a non-issue for the exam. Most exams are filled with generic questions, which any student is supposed to be able to answer, rather than any discipline-specific test questions. Instead of representing expanded ideas about literacy, this is the one exam where current-traditional practices are the norm, and classroom lectures and activities communicate that message. Students learn from standard composition textbooks on essay writing that is the one genre that elicits formulaic writing; the five-paragraph essay fits most appropriately with the time limit. For English proficiency exams, students must get straight to the point, have a clearly identifiable thesis and not an implicit one; they must have supportive examples, and grammar and punctuation should show that they have a keen awareness of how the English language operates.

Many scholars clearly advocate for writing instruction and assessment on standard academic discourses. In "Inventing the University," David Bartholomae attests to standard academic discourses as carrying primary weight in a classroom when he states that there are several correct ways to write essays, but that the student must know the commonplaces, the "culturally or institutionally authorized concept or statement that carries with it its own necessary elaboration" (514). Thus, in the classroom, the student should write to and for the commonplace of the particular discourse community in which the student finds herself or himself. Yet, Bartholomae says, basic writers have not been exposed enough to "scholarly projects, projects that would allow them to act as though

they were colleagues in an academic enterprise” (517). The more comfortable student writers feel in the university to try on a sociology scholar’s voice or a history scholar’s voice or an English scholar’s voice, the more they will see that the scholar’s voice is a voice of privilege, power, and authority different from the *common voice* (521), by which I presume Bartholomae means *home discourse* (521). Test assessment with writing across the discipline topics, then, would provide such an opportunity for students to make sense of and discuss their majors. What is troubling about Bartholomae’s notion of commonplaces is that he makes no room for home literacies, which students bring with them to their academic institutions. Can home literacy not be a start of their expertise? Another way to phrase this question is: can the exam be disrupted, challenged, and reformed and still be said to support standards that are valued by the student’s academic institution or national accreditation agencies?

The Disrupted Test

The disjuncture that writers of non-standard dialects experience has been well documented, but the responses by students on proficiency exams have been less so. In an effort to show how an author disrupts the normalizing features of test rhetoric because the personal proficiency she needs in English is different from what academic institutions required and could provide her, author Amy Tan discusses her life as both an author and a student. She shows how she handled achievement tests and her own writing development to negotiate the conflicts between academic English and Asian-influenced English. For fill-in-the-blank items to show parallel structure, she found that “the correct answer always seemed to be the most bland combinations of ‘thoughts,’ whereas in her culture ‘there were very few limitations’” as to how one can answer such statements (Tan qtd. in Bullock 568). In the case of analogies that ask for a “logical, semantic

relationship,” with her example being ‘Sunset is to nightfall as _____ is to _____’ all types of roadblocks were presented to her with the word pairs “red is to stoplight, bus is to arrival, chill is to fever, yawn is to boring” (Tan qtd. in Bullock 568). She would think of a color-filled, naturalistic scene of day changing into night, and none of the pairs fit her imagery, so that in frustration she felt the images of the pairs, “[made] it impossible for [her] to sort out something as logical as saying, ‘a sunset precedes nightfall’ is the same as ‘a chill precedes a fever.’” Tan concludes that her experiences with achievement tests in English pushed her to consider math as her area in the same ways that other Asian Americans are often inclined, she presumes through much encouragement by teachers who assume Asian Americans do not have an aptitude for English. Tan rejected the notion that she could not write or become a creative writer, and due to her experiences with the English language, she made the decision that her mother who speaks broken Chinese would be the reader she imagines when she writes.

When she tried to use standard English for her award-winning *The Joy Luck Club*, she wrote the line, “‘That was my mental quandary in its nascent state’ and found it a terrible line, which I [could] barely pronounce” (Tan qtd. in Bullock 569). The stilted prose caused her to turn to variations of her home language to speak her reality; a strategy that she found freed her to be able to communicate:

I began to write stories using all the Englishes I grew up with: the English I spoke to my mother, which for lack of a better term might be described as ‘simple’: the English she used with me, which for lack of a better term might be described as ‘broken,’ my translation of her Chinese, which could certainly be described as ‘watered down,’ and what I imagined to be her translation of her Chinese if she could speak in perfect English, her

internal language, and for that I sought to preserve the essence, but neither English nor a Chinese structure. I wanted to capture what language ability tests can never reveal; her intent, her passion, her imagery, the rhythms of her speech and the nature of her thoughts. (Tan qtd. in Bullock 570)

Indeed, it is the essence of culture that writers like Tan and students in composition classrooms try to replicate in order to reflect on what transpires in their lives so as to provide order over their existence. Choosing to use non-standard English also helps writers troubleshoot and solve personal dilemmas. These ethnic-based “Englishes” carry the value systems that academic English cannot possibly carry, a system that was created by the academy for the academy, but which does not represent all the real world experiences that will epitomize the totality of their life interactions.¹²

Linguists Thomas Kochman and Geneva Smitherman observed the language patterns of African Americans in an effort to show how Standard English and the non-standard language of Ebonics do not express the same meaning. Kochman indicates that as long as the standard is the measure of communication, then other English-based languages such as Ebonics suffer from the stereotype of a number two ranking (88). Such a term as English wipes away all notions or understandings of cultural language legitimacy:

Of course the chief reason cultural differences are ignored is that blacks and whites assume they are operating according to identical speech and cultural conventions and that these are conventions the socially dominant

¹² Katherine Schultz and Glynda Hull acknowledge in *School's Out! Bridging Out-of-School Literacies with Classroom Practice* that the shift in educators seeing diversity in language from a deficit to a value is due to Dell Hymes and Shirley Brice Heath. Both social scientists have criticized the deficit theory in favor of language diversity as expressive, necessary for social connectivity between the writer and his community, and in general, a resource, and they advocate that schools adapt to these students rather than the other way around.

white group has established as standard. This assumption—besides adding to the disruptive capacity of cultural differences—speaks to the general public failure to recognize that black norms and conventions in these areas differ from those of whites. It is also the chief obstacle to considering how they differ. (Kochman 8)

Thus, the idea of sameness that Standard English represents often negates the idea of difference, and in essence, renders non-standard cultures and their norms as obsolete. Everyone practicing the same type of academic English in speech and writing would not be problematic if such an engagement were consensual for all parties; however, it is the “disruptive capacity” that Kochman speaks of that show how grave the consequences are in being rendered invisible. He finds that a disruption occurs when African Americans break with the standard or lack some knowledge of the conventions of the standard and rely on their cultural language patterns while conversing with those who use the standard. This disruption then causes listeners or readers to deem student speakers or writers to be inferior and functioning at a developmental level. However, without the disruption that places them outside of mainstream culture, the consequence of no alternate language use would result in, as Kochman says, blacks without any norms that differ from whites, and no serious investigation as to how these norms differ. If there were no black culture with social and linguistic rules, then whites could say that the disruptive speech is a “distortion of white speech” (Kochman 8) and not work to see if their assumptions were valid resulting in no reason to encourage students to practice such a non-existent language pattern.

Both the ideology that black speech is a distortion of white speech and the lack of research in academic arenas about the merits of nonstandard language continue to cause

black students to be relegated to an inferior status. Both Kochman and Smitherman explain that blacks have a socio-linguistic pattern of playing the dozens, call and response, and signifying as well as many other language formations that follow a grammatical and stylistic structure (Kochman, *Black and White Styles*; Smitherman *Talkin and Testifyin*). However, of the two linguists, Smitherman describes more extensively why non-standard English can be the language of student choice rather than standard English, even beyond the categories Tan gives, which is allegiance to one's community and as a medium to decipher the nuances found in one's community (568). Smitherman finds in *Talkin and Testifyin* that the use of Black English outside of black communities is popular because the nuances are meanings for which Americanized English does not have grammatical structures (169); the language is lyrical (3,174-4); it connects to the African cultural heritage, which encompasses slavery; and that such use preserves this heritage, and that this English is "interwoven with culture and psychic being" (175). What could possibly go wrong with a person's psyche if denied the right to a home language in a school environment? The work done in the field of educational psychology by scholars such as Signthia Fordham and John Obgu, and Beverly Tatum answers this question when they speak to troubling issues of double consciousness, painful assimilation, and racelessness as possible outcomes due to the loss of language.

Smitherman concludes her groundbreaking work, *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America* by showing how far speakers and writers of Black English could go with such usage in larger society, a society marked as civilized by route of an education. The school environment has, however, as John Trimbur notes, its key goal as the pursuit of knowledge within a standardized curriculum that is self-serving ("Literacy" 285). However, although college personnel cannot agree on what all students must know,

they can agree on what students should not know, and one of the requirements is that they not be taught a language or support a language that they believe is riddled with mistakes. In Smitherman's chapter "Where do we go from Here? T.C.B.!: Social Policy and Educational Practice," she thinks that whether teachers believe in the cognitive deficit theory or the language difference theory, the results are still the same for the nonstandard speaker: eradication of Black English in an effort to provide students with economic and social mobility and to improve their thinking. However, the goal of teaching to uplift the mind and body is faulty, because it is based on the belief that once a person speaks fluent American English, he or she will move up in society; however, historically black Americans reside in impoverished conditions in larger numbers despite speaking standard English, which is why Smitherman indicates that "speaking White English is no guarantee to economic advancement" and to lead students to believe this is a "gross lie" (*Talkin and Testifyin* 207). Secondly, some of the skills minorities bring from home are expressive and to the point. These skills are valued in English composition classrooms, but they are destroyed when replaced with grammar drills. Smitherman adds another example of "linguistic miseducation" that hails from the English composition classroom. She finds that "the red-penciled approach stresses only 'good' grammar rather than good sense; neatness, correctness, and lifeless 'objective' language, rather than rhetorical power and the language of social and political consciousness. (Jonathan Kozol calls this approach the 'politics of syntax' [Smitherman 207]).

In her case study example, Smitherman shows a student response to a (test) prompt on the Viet Nam War and his teacher's reaction:

"I think the war in Viet Nam bad. Because we don't have no

business over there. My brother friend been in the war, and he say it's hard and mean. I do not like war because it's bad. And so I don't think we have no business there. The reason the war in China is bad is that American boys is dying over there."

The paper was returned to the student with only one comment: "Correct your grammar and resubmit." The problem with such writing "instruction" is that it fails to deal with the basic problems of most student writers, be they black or white. Namely, weaknesses in organization, content, logic, coherence, use of supporting details, and communicative power.

On the other hand, if the writing is strong in organization, content and rhetorical power, but written in the black [cultural idioms and rhetorical patterns], the writer is severely penalized for Black English "errors" and typically receives a low or no-pass grade. Mis-instruction of this nature reinforces the erroneous notion that one need only be correct in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and other mechanics to git ovah in the communication process. As one student put it, 'You ain got to write good, just correctly.' (214-215)

While some teachers see grammar and mechanical aptitude as a sign of logical thought and the venue by which students can acquire power within mainstream society, other teachers align with Smitherman, including Bruce Horner, John Trimbur and Keith Gilyard. These scholars set the goal of linguistic aptitude as making sense of how language works to further the goals of pluralism and globalism (Horner and Trimbur,

“English Only” 618-624; Gilyard 71).

One example of the potential conclusion is provided by an African American student of mine who once told me that he felt compelled to use the phrase, “He called me up out of my name” to represent his culture that would recognize these words as “fighting words” before he described the actual fight he was in. He then said that if he were to use the Standard English, “He called me a name,” he would sound tame, weak even, and such confinement would not allow him to be able to render the high drama which evoked the fight scene in his text. Standard English traditional classrooms and Standard English Proficiency Exams, theoretically, would not be able to place or reward such vocabulary. But without such a sentence, the student felt powerless to be descriptive and aligned with his culture’s values, which represents an ethnicity unlike the nationalistic tropes that Standard English offers.

When students sit for the EPE at Carey, they are given the grading rubric so that they are aware of the graders’ expectations. This rubric is similar to others found across the country in that it states that passing papers which are rated four to six have to be “well organized and well developed,” with “unity and coherence,” and that “word choice,” and “mechanics and usage” should “display clear facility” (Carey EPE Exam Evaluative Criteria in appendix). Students cannot help but interpret these requirements to mean formal writing and not experimental writing such as open-ended pieces or alternative discourse forms. Formal writing, then, becomes a mechanical, formulaic, skills-based approach for many of these test takers.

Edward White states that “writing proficiency is one of those slippery terms that hide an even more slippery concept” (*Assigning* 23). He goes on to claim how these evaluative instruments can be reductive:

In many instances, the term proficiency seems merely to replace the workaday term skill—on the well-established bureaucratic principle that long words for simple concepts are more dignified than short words. But an additional sense of adequacy, sufficiency for a particular purpose, is conveyed by the word proficiency. A person who is proficient is demonstrably capable. The fact that some people who pass their “proficiencies” are not particularly capable—in fact, are at best minimally functional at a few skills—sometimes makes the terminology of proficiency testing seem pretentious. On some college campuses, the proficiency test that certifies student writing as sufficient for the bachelor’s degree is actually less demanding than the freshman placement test; the proficiency test is in fact a minimal competency test of mechanics designed only to weed out the students most likely to embarrass the institution whenever they set pen to paper. (*Assigning* 105-106)

These tests are designed to uphold university standards. The “proficiency barrier assessments,” as White calls them, are tests that help define academic discourse in English as skills-based (*Assigning* 105). Brian Huot agrees with Edward White, calling on us to use assessments to uphold university standards or detect students who need extra help but also to begin to theorize the test in light of social-epistemic rhetoric.¹³ He finds, with the focus on test reliability and validity informed by the empirical methodologies that hail from the social sciences and education, particularly work in psychometrics and

¹³ For an explanation of how Huot argues for social-epistemic rhetoric instruction as a way for students to learn about the positive and negative that people assign to different language use, and the rewards or losses students are willing to take as a result of using non-standard language among Standard language readers.

test measurement procedures, that correct syntax, grammar, and ‘modes’ of discourse are the least difficult to measure.

However, test writers who value correctness may ignore the history of assessment that has allowed for social-epistemic writing, Huot summarizes his position:

Actually, my intention to (re)articulate writing assessment as a positive, important aspect of designing, administrating and theorizing writing instruction has its roots in early conceptions of assessment as progressive social action. The idea of assessment as social action is not new. Since its inception in ancient China, assessment was supposed to disrupt existing social order and class systems (qtd. in Hanson, 1993). However, as we all know, assessment has rarely delivered on this promise. Instead, assessment has been used as an interested social mechanism for reinscribing current power relations and class systems. (7)

Lester Faigley and Anne Gere, among others, challenged Huot and those in test assessment studies in composition to go beyond the practical issues of how best to design and evaluate written exams (87). Huot, as well as Peggy O’Neil and Edward White are theorizing what written proficiency tests do, and as a result, academic discourse in English is being more sharply defined. However, Patricia Bizzell warns that to practice “anti-foundationalism” through critical analysis of “foundationalist” (Rorty’s term) attitudes, which are the beliefs that academic discourse “transcends all social action,” and are, therefore, over-authoritative, makes the method of analysis itself foundationalist (“Foundationalism” 218). Therefore, when students question and “demystify” the dominant Standard English academic discourse and use less powerful discourses to undermine it, the less powerful ones become the dominant discourses, and thus, become

themselves foundational discourses. So what have the students really learned by the disrupted test in order to be successful writers? Indeed, what have test theorists in writing such as Huot accomplished by using exams to see and criticize how the language on the exams and the knowledge expected from students who take the exams are being subsumed by the dominant academic discourse? One crucial argument about discourse analysis work in the first-year composition classroom, then, has to be that such work produces circular reasoning.

Patricia Bizzell combines skills pedagogy and radical content work in an effort to undermine dominant discourses in concrete ways. Bizzell changes the nature of the academic institution as paternal, authoritative, and politically uncontested when she discusses the “clashes” that take place for basic writers upon entering the college environment—the clash of dialects, discourse forms, and ways of thinking (“What Happens” 164-165). She suggests that these “basic writers,” termed as such by what they write and often by college placement procedures, should learn academic discourse and its worldview of critical inquiry, and then use academic language and the discourse forms that Bartholomae describes (prior knowledge, original ideas and so on) to advocate for bicultural programs in the university and to more fully alter an ideology that subsumes all other world views, which is the “hegemonic power of the academic world view” that is categorized as academic discourse (“What Happens” 171, 173). Thus, Bizzell understands the skills freshman college writers must acquire to succeed, but she, like other scholars, places those skills within a politicized context that views language as a tool for redistributing power to more students. Thus, the disrupting test does not act as another form of foundationalism or circular reasoning because it expands written

assessment in English by offering another choice for agency in student writing.

Proficiency exams, then, are the microcosm of a much larger issue.

Institutions are practicing language bias, the same bias that Huot finds plagues test assessments:

A final role that teachers can take is to acknowledge the unfair discourse-stacking that our society engages in. They can discuss openly the injustices of allowing certain people to succeed, based not upon merit but upon which family they were born into, upon which discourse they had access to as children. The students, of course, already know this, but the open acknowledgment of it in the very institution that facilitates the sorting process is liberating in itself. In short, teachers must allow discussions of oppression to become a part of language and literature instruction. (301)

However, once the issue of “discourse-stacking” is made visible, concrete changes in curriculum reform would be the next logical and most reasonable step. The intersection of the end of the EPE at William Carey and the start of a Writing Across the Curriculum initiative suggests that the English department is moving from an apolitical stance, which appears to be associated with standards, to a political stance in theory and practice, since the department is trying to more sharply define what language is, how it works, and whom it serves. Discourse-stacking may very well be a problem for Carey and other institutions that are considering written proficiency test assessments, because the nature of what they are designed to do ensures that some students will continue moving up in their academic career while others must complete remedial work. Post-EPE reform that includes portfolio assessment could still fall into the same trap of discourse-stacking.

Indeed, determining what we mean by academic discourse at Carey could result in a widening of the cut-off scores that enable students to move to upper-level English classes. Thus, those students who would probably be deemed basic writers who belong in a remedial class would be given a second chance to prove the legitimacy of their writing while Carey is in the throes of curriculum reform in composition. Students are no longer placed in our now defunct English 105 remedial class as they used to be when they failed the EPE. Beyond the English 101 and 102 required for all students, they can decide for themselves whether they want to take our English 100, Essentials in Grammar and Writing, a refresher course with pass/fail grading. However, this may all change for students once a new form of assessment in the English department and possibly across the disciplines is in place. This juncture in the academic arena makes for a very powerful point as to why the discussion of academic discourse is worthy of our careful consideration. If academic discourse reflects our instruction, then it is also the caveat that informs our teaching. Whether we teach from a skills-based perspective or a social justice, content perspective, we will be establishing, as we do in all of our endeavors in the classroom, a hierarchy whereby we position our students as fitting our pedagogy or as incapable of achieving because they are writing outside of our zone of comfort. Thus, academic discourse has the power to objectify our students rather than opening space for them to be subjects with control over where their writing takes them.

Mike Rose speaks about the process of student objectification that happens in classrooms based on the way literacy is defined. According to Rose, students walk into the writing classroom with a good amount of autonomy based on various pre-existing literacies. They have functional literacy according to the governmental requirements that adults be able to read and write at a sixth-grade level, they have their own cultural knowledge, they

have the need to read what interests them, they have workplace literacy, and they have high school literacy (Rose, “The Language of Exclusion” 596-598). This situation all begins to change when they realize they are unfamiliar with the academic literacy that constitutes *belles lettres*, and they may have no idea how to articulate their culture within their new academic environment (Rose, “The Language of Exclusion” 597). This does not mean they lack literacy, but rather that they function under different assumptions and principles that too often they are not permitted to use. Thus, their subjectivity becomes limited, and once their literacies are eradicated rather than used as foundation upon which to build learning, they begin to believe that they are strangers within the ivy tower. Assimilation may be the goal of such prescriptive teaching, but for many students the nature of writing is viewed as restrictive rather than liberating, confusing rather than enlightening. Rose points out that literacy as a blanket definition can stigmatize students and so he calls for “definitional accuracy” (“The Language of Exclusion” 598) of what we mean by the type of literacy we want our students to have.

Literacy, Rose insists, is a powerful term with such far-reaching consequences for both students and writing programs. He cites Shirley Brice Heath on how in the mid-nineteenth century, literacy was associated with ‘character, intellect, morality, and good taste,’ which many of these perceptions of students have been carried over to today. As Rose says, “Tag some group illiterate, and you’ve gone beyond letters; you’ve judged their morals and their minds” (“The Language of Exclusion” 597). He concludes that “such talk” of student illiteracy can result in the “political and decision-making settings” within the institution working to keep the student in a lower status, “a very different place in the social-political makeup of the academy” (Rose, “The Language of Exclusion” 598). What Rose’s definitional analysis of literacy reveals, then, is that the concept of

literacy and how it is practiced has social and political implications, both dynamics at work in English composition classrooms and in Post-EPE curricular decision-making. Moreover, a focus on standards only as Hairston and other scholars claim, potentially means that biased positioning of students may occur and go unnoticed, and subsequently, unchallenged.

The normalizing features of Standard English can be seen in the observations by Bizzell. She reminds us of exactly what happens if academic literacy in the classroom is a monolith:

If we do not know that there are other literacies in society, then we cannot ask why this particular literacy, as opposed to the others, has gained ascendance in the academy. If we do not ask this question, then we also screen out questions about the personal connections students have to other discourses, the social contexts in which other discourses are appropriate, and the historical conditions that give cultural powers to some discourses and deny it to others. In short, we screen out precisely the kinds of question that anti-foundationalism is moved to ask (“Foundationalism” 208).

Allowing for multiple discourses in the classroom by situating these discourses alongside academic discourse, however, may be accepted only in liberal classrooms. Such a practice stops short for proficiency tests or other forms of assessment, because such tests can only be measured accurately if all teachers are trained to read in a multicultural way. Moreover, other departments may have difficulty accepting a university-sanctioned exam that is graded subjectively. These considerations must be taken into account before Carey redesigns its writing program—while the rest of the

academic community waits.

Bizzell notes that teachers who are considered radical can be met with interdisciplinary opposition in the form of alienation:

The British pedagogical approach, too, sets up oppositions between academic and non-academic discourses, favoring the latter by, for example, allowing students to submit as research papers, transcripts of interviews with relatives about their family history along with the students' own reflections about what learning this history has meant to them. Peter Medway shows, however, that by accepting such work he is not really granting legitimacy within the academy to non-academic discourses; nowhere else but in his classroom is such work accepted.

(“Foundationalism” 214)

She claims that for the students’ non-standard discourses to have prestige in the academy, the entire institution would have to accept their legitimacy. Isolated classroom inclusiveness is less effective for both students and the teachers who practice this pedagogy since such diverse academic values sends mix messages to students as to what writing is supposed to accomplish.

In current practice, culturally relevant teaching tries to legitimize discourse inclusion by theorizing language and knowledge. Educators Colette Daiute and Hollie Jones in “Diversity Discourses: Reading Race and Ethnicity in and around Children’s Writing” describe racial identity theory to discuss the discourse patterns children use that teachers in multicultural classrooms are sensitive toward and foster in order to help these students write better. Daiute and Jones identify nine race and ethnic discourse strategies that range from full engagement with culturally ideas to full avoidance from a connection to

culture, and they are: identifying (using explicit wording such as “race,” “ethnicity”), contextualizing (talking about race in institutional terms), broadening (using synonyms for difference), practicing (using the language of one’s culture), empathizing (feeling the consequences of difference or discrimination for self and others), universalizing (finding commonality between people), distancing (trying to be above or beyond the pain of discrimination), avoiding (acting as though discrimination does not exist), and personalizing (considering discrimination that happened to someone else also happened to me) (182-188). What is noteworthy here is that the teachers of these children responded to their papers using the same nine strategies that the students used. Engaged teachers treated the students’ stories of discrimination as culturally sensitive and individualistic matter, which helped the writers grapple with the difficult concepts of race and ethnicity that inform their lives. However, one teacher practiced the avoidance pattern of reading their racialized texts:

This teacher worked with the literature and curriculum in a way that focused exclusively (in the transcripts we examined) on issues of language, writing process, and reading strategy. Instead of discussing the content of characters’ racist comments, this teacher engaged children in generating adjectives and identifying plot structure.

(Daiute and Jones 190)

The authors posit, then, that students who write racially marked papers are trying to create their own histories without their work being “scripted” for them. I would argue that the teacher practicing avoidance by not discussing the content of their papers is scripting them as language learners without the authority to apply their language skills and knowledge to topics that are most important to them. Academic discourse, following

these authors' line of reasoning, could also be said to contain an element of avoidance in the ways that it can script college writers to be objective, analytical, distant and resolute at the expense of opened inquiry, strongly voiced, politically contextualized prose.

In *ALT Dis: Alternative Discourses and the Academy*, Christopher Schroeder, Helen Fox, and Patricia Bizzell (2002) discuss how professional scholars in the field are using alternative forms of discourse in the academic arena because it allows them to think and problem-solve better (12). These academics are mixing discourse forms so that audiences may find non-standard dialects and stories of cultural customs throughout very substantial scholarship on, say, Aristotle or Bakhtin. Scholars such as mixed blood writer Malea Powell who uses Indian terms, Laura Lai Long who creates double meanings beginning with her title "Full (dis)Course Meal: Some Words on Hybrid/Alternative Discourses" and others such as Kermit Campbell, all find that by using the discourse conventions of their home, they are able to change their place of the "other" that institutional systems prescribe for them to that of the insider. Moreover, by making claims and supporting their claims by using elements of standard academic discourse, their goal is not to alienate their readers by making them the new outsiders. Instead, they see the only way to persuade readers as to the legitimacy of non-standard language is to take them more fully into their communities by immersing their readers into their cultures as though this culture writing were the norm and academic discourse is the backdrop which supplements their positions. Their writing mirrors the speeches and texts of religion and philosophy scholars Cornell West and Michael Eric Dyson. This type of "hybrid" writing that the authors of these essays call alt. dis is in response to the reemergence of the 1974 Conference on College Composition and Communication resolution, "The Students' Rights to Their Own Language." The authors remark that the

“Students’ Rights” resolution has not been fully utilized in classrooms since its inception. The resolution asked that teachers permit students to use their non-standard dialects so that they could express themselves and make meaning from the situations they encountered. However, Black English and other dialects were relegated to journal writing or informal pieces; teachers also permitted it in order to find and mark errors (vii). Following the lead of Mina Shaughnessy’s 1977 *Errors and Expectations* and Writing Across the Curriculum interests in promoting traditional academic discourse, teachers felt compelled to teach such a discourse as the most effective form of instruction for basic writers (viii). But now scholars are trying to center the resolution again within the field of Rhetoric and Composition by showing how logic itself is a part of hybrid writing. I would like to handle the great dichotomy between standard academic discourse being rational and alternative discourse being irrational in the following chapter because there is a tradition in the field of pairing cognitive processes with academic discourse. Thus, a clearer definition of academic discourse can only be derived when teachers and administrators are assured that the discourse students use will assist them in thinking logically and presenting information logically. What is important here is that authors are expanding the ways students can think about their topics.

The preceding literature shows that academic discourse carries with it the cultural assumptions, expectations, and conventions of the university. Academic discourse is hierarchical in nature in that it places the teacher as the authority figure in the classroom and the students in subordinate positions. One primary finding in this literature is that test assessments measuring writing proficiency carry the traits of traditional academic discourse. These traits are not reflective of culturally inclusive classrooms, and therefore, the test assessments cannot really determine the true merit of many students’

writing ability. In other words, these tests and other forms of assessments such as portfolio assessments should qualify more exactly how they claim to be reflective of student agency and culturally relevant teaching instruction.

Methodology

When I took the English Proficiency Exam myself as a student at William Carey, current-traditional practices were part of the local landscape during the 1980s. The English teachers marked for grammar, students got in groups to discuss their grammar rather than the content of our papers, and most often we accepted our low grades and moved on. For me and many of our classmates the goal in English class was to say what we would say well on paper, but not to weigh whether what we said had any social, political, or personal significance. My narrative about college writing is in many ways similar to that recorded by Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary* and Victor Villanueva's *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color* and experienced by all the students past and present who remain faceless behind the written texts they submit to English teachers. By the time I sat for the exam I was reciting grammar rules in my head, telling myself to use the grammar tricks that I know and not some new one that I thought I had learned the night before the test, and to count the words. Only when I tell this story of attention to form over detail, in an effort to prove to test-graders that I had in fact learned what had been taught in my English 101 and 102 classes, do I get other stories from the English professionals in and out of my department. The chair of the English department relates time and again to our staff how he took the English Proficiency Exam and misspelled one word. With only minutes on the clock, he thought that the word would cost him a failing grade, and so he carefully rewrote the entire essay. Another college English teacher remarked that his content did not make sense, but it was written well

grammatically. He said that he intentionally sounded wordy, allusive, and not pointed just to see if these items would be marked and he would fail; they were not, and he passed. I am interested in this anxiety where the self is lost in hypercorrection or lost to a full awareness to what language can and cannot do or lost in defiance and disruption of the status quo in an effort to be heard rather than in an effort to show mastery in variations of English. These types of writers are still present in proficiency testing rooms today, and they fail needlessly.

Despite the work in Constructivist Theory, Expressivist Theory, and Social-Epistemic research, students lose ground in large numbers practicing these forms of expression on proficiency exams. And despite the fact that traditionalism has been pushed aside for Process Theory that indicates that the stages of writing—prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing—has more merit than the finished product, students still do word counts, vocabulary changes in order to sound academic, and grammar checks to the exclusion of having a real purpose for writing on these often timed exams. Even portfolio writing can fall victim to prescriptive evaluation.

Process writing is designed to help students find their voice and project their worlds through writing to serve their purposes, which does not mean that they are insular writers, but that they write as advocates to and for other people about highly public situations. However, on these exams many students never get to this higher purpose for writing because they have received an institutional message from the moment they walk into their first college English class that they write for us.

Carey faculty, like those at other institutions such as Miami University and the California college system, use rhetorical textbooks and develop assignments where we question how language both subjugates and frees writers and readers. Yet despite

teacher attention to process pedagogy, I began to wonder how the concept of *large-scale (campus-wide) writing* and the concept of *test* signify to students that current-traditional ways of writing in its most rigid form possible is required? Although I have heard teachers lament that their student submitted a dry EPE, rarely do we in particular or the writing field in general question the subtle and not-so-subtle ways we encourage the writing we dislike seeing on proficiency tests. In a broader sense, we also rarely find in the research how much an influence the faculty, their classes, and their writing situations have on the student test-taker. Thus, the pervasive nature of testing in the college environment needs to be narrated in order to uncover how the word *testing* itself results in formalism with attention to sound content, and how faculty in and out of the English department break from their theoretical stances on education and writing pedagogy when it comes to standardized tests, and then send this message on to student test-takers. In short, I question how a test can be so powerful as to make large numbers of the school body change in such fundamental ways that teaching and testing become mutually exclusive terms and that students fail in trying to meet such demands. To answer this overall question about the metanarrative that is the proficiency exam, I could have used ethnography to study the school culture and their beliefs, but instead, I chose discourse analysis.

Ethnography would have worked well in order to understand the significance of communication. Muriel Saville-Troike explains that recording the speech acts and written acts of participants elicits to what degree their movements are influenced by others, what they reject from these influences and why, and what they accept and why (51). Hence, under an ethnography paradigm, I could have studied a small group of students and recorded how they processed their English classes after classes, looked at

how they transferred what they learned to their writing, and then traced their literacy acts to whether I see similarities between what they have said and written in English to how they did on their proficiency exams. However, I did not perform an ethnography because it would limit me to studying one group of people in order to represent them well with thick description. I would not have been able to see and hear the messages that both teachers in the English department or out of the English department use as influence. Discourse analysis, however, allowed me to interweave all three groups in order to see how the test affects all three in the way they process and transmit definitions of the exam to each other.

My research questions worked as a guide for setting the stage for my work narrating my case study example, William Carey University. The first question I had was what faculty on campus outside of the English department had strong beliefs about writing and to what degree our institution should value the test. In order to gather this information, I used an anecdotal survey, which was blind as to demographics with the exception that each faculty member had to give their department, but not their individual name. The reason it was a blind survey was so that faculty would be comfortable discussing whether or not they valued writing in their classrooms. If they said that they did not value writing, there could be no consequences to their actions handed out by administrators. Out of the 100 surveys sent out to all departments on three campuses, there were 24 responses. The non-responses could be attributed to some faculty feeling uncomfortable about saying whether writing was a part of their classroom to an English teacher-researcher. Although I specified that this survey was for fact gathering only so that I could choose from the respondents departments to interview, I could not ignore the fact that I also represent the English department on the main campus as faculty and thus

the very institution that they would have to evaluate. The appendix will show both the survey and the number of respondents. Those that did respond value writing in their classrooms and would welcome the opportunity to share in a discussion of the various ways writing is defined by them to students. Many of the respondents also indicated that the EPE represented their concept of what college writing is, and since we discontinued the exam in 2008, these respondents expressed their dismay that the test had ended and they questioned why it ended. I was able to set up meetings with four of these departments in order to discuss what their theoretical and pedagogical stances were when it came to writing in their classrooms and how they shared these stances with their students through writing assignments and when they discussed the EPE with their students. Specifically, I tape recorded the departments in Art, Business, Education, and English.

Without sharing what the other departments had said about the English department, the EPE, and writing in general, I conducted a focus group session with members of my own department in order to better understand their views of writing and the ways that they transmit their views to students. I specifically requested that the Chair of the English department, Dr. Richardson, not be present for this two-hour session so that his administrative view would not in any way influence their teacher-researcher views. The participants in the focus group were also tape recorded, and I asked questions as the host without participating. The only time I did respond was to clarify questions. My specific reason for calling this group together is because the English faculty has the most continuous interaction with the student population about writing, whereas outside faculty only used writing as one tool to get across large amounts of information. In the English department, English is the information that we are trying to get across, so this group, of

their own accord, dealt with English not as a procedure, as do the outside faculty, but as a philosophical and mental exercise. In short, they presented how English is a serious calling that has several ramifications beyond the classroom, the test, and teaching students English just so they can secure a good job.

Lastly, in order to understand the students' perspective of English found throughout William Carey, I reviewed 300 EPEs from 2005-2008. I did this review in order to find patterns in their writing that may reflect what they have been taught in classrooms on campus. For example, those students who would count words as they wrote and put them in the margins can be seen as a response to requirement on the test that the essay must at least be 500 words. Thus, the test designers in our department felt that by at least 500 words, the writer is making a point, and the test-taker got this message that good writing equates to counting, so they counted. A more effective method would have been to talk directly to students who have taken or were taking the test, but since my dissertation idea came about as the sixty-year old test abruptly ended, prompting me to reflect on what the test tried to do and where we will go now post-assessment, I could not interview students who were preparing for the test or had just taken it. Therefore, I could not surmise what messages they were actually taking with them into the test through talk aloud protocols. However, the rich data from the actual EPE did show patterns from which an educated narrative could be formed wherein students played it safe and followed current-traditional practices; they hypercorrected often causing failure, or they mixed academic and non-academic discourses, also causing failure. The latter strategy is what I call the *disrupted or unexpected text* and it is the most fascinating because the question becomes where does the student get the message that he or she can use non-standard language and structures in an academic environment

on a test? The very surprising answer is that some of the very faculty in and out of the English department that on the surface appear rigid in their views on English also wonder whether alternative discourse does not have a space in an academic institution so much so that they have provided spaces for it in their own pedagogies. My dissertation, then, explores ways we can straighten out these often contradictory messages that cause students to lose agency in their writing on these tests even when they pass and cause many others to fail because they cannot find that comfortable medium between writing for self and writing for what they perceive the test-evaluator wants to read. There is no panacea for such subjective ills that beset the testing situation. However, the WPA literature, the test reforms that have appeared at various other institutions, and the awareness that teachers have come to on our own campus show how simply explaining the contradictory nature of a definition of College English is a start toward helping students sort out and represent the personas they wish to present on a test that will be both received and read well by evaluators.

CHAPTER III

FACULTY RECEPTION OF THE MULTI-LITERATE TEXT IN THE ACADEMY

The findings reported in this study and other studies of nonschool literacy and language practices will be wasted if teachers and administrators concerned with literacy and language instruction, particularly writing instruction, do not find bridges between the community and the classroom. We cannot place the burden on students alone to recognize and find strategies to negotiate their ways through sites of conflict and common ground.

—Beverly Moss, *A Community Text Arises: A Literate Text and A Literacy Tradition in African-American Churches* (2003)

The reception by colleges and universities of the multi-literate text, that is, one that combines home literacy with school literacy, has not been reflected on standardized proficiency exams at most colleges and universities. However, Moss' findings in *A Community Text Arises* show college students who did not just drop their culture at the door upon entering a college composition classroom. Cultural ways of understanding and using literacy are such an important part of those who embrace them, and, she explains, they have such a strong hold on lives that even African Americans who do not go to African American churches are influenced by the sermonic tradition found in the African American church (152). Her explanation clearly gives insight as to why U.S. President Barack Obama—a bi-racial, Harvard educated attorney—retains his use of call and response, musical cadences and rhythms, and other African American church speech patterns to address Americans both verbally and in writing. But where can a student text that may contain nonstandard language, or unusual rhetorical patterns, or a homage to community, or possibly a combination of all three elements stand in relation to academe which values, as Moss states, “the dominant model of literate text,” which is “monologic in voice,” and is “most closely identified with the essayist academic literacy” (152)?

Moss raises an important question. If students have a level of expertise in their own language, but it is not the language required by composition classrooms—and I would extend her argument to proficiency exams—they are at a severe disadvantage. They may lack a way to produce their most vibrant images and clearest thoughts without the nonstandard as a conduit. We know from the number of foreign students who use translators in and out of English composition classrooms that this reliance on the non-standard discourse in order to transition to the Standard is ever present. Moreover, it also puts composition teachers at a disadvantage to assume that students will not try to make sense of the required Standard without referencing the similarities and differences between their language and the Standard. To assume that all students in our classrooms are working with just Standard Academic English and trying to improve upon this knowledge is to assume that they are only literate in the school literacy to which they have had greatest exposure to and represent the sole influence that they value. Such assumptions are dangerous because students who are weak in Standard Academic Literacy may then be stereotyped as less than intelligent language users when in fact that may well be extremely intelligent multi-literate users of language; the consequence of such assumptions is that without understanding what students bring to the classroom, the teacher may start teaching at the wrong point, such as teaching English as a refresher course or even teaching English as if the student has missed out on learning the Standard through his years in school and should now in college be seen as a blank page on which the Standard must be written on for him to be a successful writer. However, the teacher that views diversity as an asset will start from the correct teaching point, as Moss admonishes us all to do, where it is not the student's burden alone to bridge what he

knows with what he needs to know, but our job as well. By allowing students to use the strategies they bring to the classroom, we encourage them to accept and make sense of academic literacy.

William Carey teachers are very much aware that their students are trying to negotiate their ways through sites of conflict posed by academic English and the common ground of home discourses that represent their comfort zones. In a focus group discussion, four Carey English faculty and one foreign language faculty member who has taught English at Carey for years spent two hours working to articulate if there is a place for a multi-literate student text either in class or on a future proficiency exam at Carey. They contemplated this possibility of diversity in the context of our academic environment that values Standard English as the language of communication. Their analysis of *academic discourse* and *proficiency* shows how complex these terms are and how conditional. However, their analysis also reveals how facilely a new philosophical framework based on their values could be used to build a new form of written assessment that takes into account non-standard and Standard discourses. The paradox that these concepts of academic discourse and proficiency are difficult to define, but can be possible to implement, is covered as part of this chapter. However, this paradox of multiple definitions of these terms cannot be understood well without covering the larger paradox that this chapter also raises, which is that once the EPE is mentioned during this conversation, it becomes a dominate discourse in its own right that both makes the various definition of these terms seem unruly and mutually exclusive when they should not, and silences the teachers in that they offer no room for conceiving of alternative discourse as an option.

Grammar and More Grammar: The Historical School Narratives of Carey English Teachers

All eight teachers in the English department were invited to attend this focus group. For the purposes of time and consistency in this study, I limited the meeting to one occasion between one to two hours, as I did with the one-time meetings I had with the other departments on the subject of what college English is and what expectations they had for the EPE. Due to scheduling conflicts, three of the faculty were not present. Moreover, as stated previously in chapter II, the Chair of the English department was not asked to attend the discussion because his leadership role may have caused a reduction in candid conversation. The faculty present were four women and one man. Each member has taught English for at least ten years from the high school level, the junior college level, to the college level. Our senior faculty consisted of two women who have each taught English for over thirty years.

The group was first asked for their general definitions of academic discourse, which ranged from “discourse that is Standard English” to “discourse that is discipline-specific, but has features that are expected in Standard English composition, such as introduction, transitions, and paragraphs” to the very general, “there are several academic discourses.” Then the faculty were given a passing EPE to read with my reason being that they could define what good writing was by actually citing evidence from a real test. I was trying to move them beyond general, abstract definitions of academic discourse to concrete examples located in a test that the faculty considers valid even after its demise. I used a passing test rather than a failing one because I assumed that whatever they found to be of worth would also be what they would find lacking in an unsuccessful exam. In order to raise the stakes and help them get beyond seeing the test as a definitive example of

passing, I also had them read a passing CLEP test of a student who wrote for a Carey audience in the hopes of testing out of English 101. Both tests were written in Standard English, which means that neither test used non-standard discourse. I wanted them to compare the two exams to see if they would rank the EPE higher than a fail but lower or higher than a CLEP test. I also believed that the presence of a different test, but not necessarily of a different standard, would compel them even more to justify why the EPE under consideration succeeded in the event, the faculty did rank the passing EPE as lower than the CLEP.

The following example is representative of the type of EPEs that William Carey faculty have judged to be passing:

Uniforms for Unity

The idea of a uniform policy is spreading across the American nation. Schools are searching for ways to make all students feel accepted and united under a school banner. Although many students and parents lash out for the rights of individuality, the uniform policy is a good idea that all schools should consider. Uniform policies help eliminate classroom distractions, they help in the unification process, and uniforms dim the lights on social class division. (Sample student essay #1)

In terms of the Carey EPE, a 1, 2, or 3 is failing, and a 4, 5, 6 is passing, and this student did pass in 2005 in the 4 or 5 range, which constitutes a B/B- average. When the focus group reevaluated the “Uniforms for Unity” exam, every single one agreed that the prose was stilted but accurate. As one teacher emphasized, “What more could we have asked from the student with such a dry topic matter?” (William Carey English Faculty Focus Group Meeting, 2010). Here the very test itself makes the teacher believe that no

risk-taking in writing could have been asked for from the student. Many of the teachers listening nodded their heads in agreement. Moreover, the test answer seems an appropriate response to a testing protocol or testing situation that evokes a perception in most people that such tests, unlike papers that go through drafts, feedback and revision, are formal, therefore, they require formal responses. Even more so, the student is writing a Standard English text according to the test directions. Thus, from the directions alone, she is called upon to use what she knows about what the English department and the university value about language use for academic texts. In the conversation below, once the test is squarely the focus of the group, the faculty discussion situates the student's text in the context of correct grammar and structure as a singular idea of academic discourse and to the exclusion of alternative discourse.

Brookter: Why did this pass?

Levin: I was gonna say—. Having graded the EPE, it seems to me the standards and I agree [with] that at one time—when I graded it before you guys got rid of it. It seems to me that the standards were that the essay had, if not master the basic grammar, at least grammar that didn't mortify or at least for the most part pretty big grammar. And it made an argument that had a point and it had structure. You know it had structure.

Howze: I think this writer knew to whom he or she were writing. You know because it's got the introductory paragraph. It's got the essay may 1, 2, 3 points and like you say.

Terrell: The thesis, the end of the first paragraph, yes it's formulaic which I'm tired of that formula, but—

Simmons: But if we're measuring basic literacy, that's that section to be the measure of basic literacy.

Terrell: Because she had her transitions and I'm saying she is on this one because it looks like a girl's handwriting.

In this exchange, the teachers accept the fact that the EPE meets the validity objective, despite the fact that one teacher says she is tired of the formula and another teacher begins to make a statement about the Standards being something she agreed to at one time with the implication that she no longer agrees that Standards should be all we should measure or what we should measure. Neither teacher finishes this line of thought, and I would speculate that to do so would define academic discourse a different way that would seem both unruly and excluded from the dominant rhetoric of Standards ideology that the test exemplifies. When a bit later in the conversation two teachers join grammar with set structure, there is no doubt that the test and academic discourse are both defined in terms of those considerations. Howze states, "There are some basic things that we mentioned it has that's--uh--that is common to all academic discourse and—, and you know, I think that's something we mentioned, like introduction and organization and transitions." Terrell adds in agreement, "Basic. It was not error-free but they weren't distracting. It's safe to say these assessment opinions go back to their initiation into academic discourse." This test exemplifying the student's "initiation into academic discourse" is not unlike the similar descriptions they give throughout the conversation of good writing that is accepted in the classroom. Thus, these teachers are in agreement that the test also meets the reliability objective because what is taught in the classroom is definitely expected on the test, and students respond accordingly.

Compositionist Lynn Bloom would say this text falls under her category called “good enough writing.” She states that such minimalist writing “is characterized by a clutch of Academic Virtues,” which include:

Rationality; Conformity, Conventionality—which is attained by using Standard English, following the rules, and otherwise maintaining proper academic decorum; Self-Reliance, Responsibility, Honesty; Order; Modesty in form and style; Efficiency, and Economy. When accompanied by Punctuality, turning the papers in on time, according to the demands of the academic schedule, a great deal of student writing that meets these criteria—perhaps most of it—should be good enough to receive a good enough grade, a B, in most institutions. (Bloom 72)

Although the essay response sets up an introduction that is very organized and coherent, the student appears very distant from the text. Anyone could have written this piece. Bloom uses her evaluative criteria to indicate what she does not want writing limited to, but instead she wants student writers to produce “generally good” work (83). She reminds us that there are “Teachers who value critical thinking, originality, discovery, experimentation, and other attributes of creativity—striking metaphors, dazzling language, a powerful individual voice—[and they] may...downgrade papers that are unoriginal, vacuous, faceless, voiceless, or otherwise bland” (82). Although Bloom is talking about papers created in the classroom with the possibility of revision, her directives can be applied to English Proficiency Exams. The teachers in the focus group read this piece quickly and had little to say about it other than two of them who chimed in that the paper was “typical” but the CLEP was highly engaging. (William Carey English Faculty Focus Group Meeting, 2010).

However, when the conversation changes to the teachers' own writing, they begin to handle this focus by giving their historical school life narratives that predate their Carey experiences with testing. What is significant is that their narratives begin to define academic discourse beyond the boundaries of grammar and structural conventions. Indeed, I would argue that there is a contradiction present in what they were taught as student learners about college writing and how they see themselves as teachers of English. This disconnect is understandable, although lamentable, because professions can cause a split in personality; we are often able to teach—and believe we are compelled to teach—that which is common to the profession even if it is different from our lived experiences with writing. Thus, even though they have been taught as teachers to explain grammar and mechanics as the conduit to good writing and logical thinking, as students they were taught attributes of writing and thinking far more complex and demanding of a higher thinking skill set than grammar and mechanics. Their responses to my question of where they first learned that there is an academic discourse, however they define it, is quite telling:

Simmons: I realized that when I took World Civ class in junior college; I kept out of 101 and 102 so I didn't have to do the 101 and 102 writing classes. But my first World Civ class, I mean I was like using over generalizations and other things, and the professor wrote back notes saying, "This is not—I mean you've got no credence for this." And when I really found it out, because I mean, just to be honest, I made it through junior college without too much difficulty, but when I came here, my first philosophy paper I got back and it had—I'd always had As on papers and it came back a C+ and I thought, "Well, what in the—here's a C+." And

so, well, all right, it had red all over it, you make this plain, and I realized then that there are different ways to write. And that's just been reinforced being in multiple departments. I have to write papers in a certain way when I go to philosophy conferences that would not feel the same way as a literary conference and it's just completely different, and so it's been reinforced. But the first time was when I was in—I hit college and that began to tell me.

Howze: I think I must've been a slow learner because I didn't—I guess I realized it in college, but it was only when I was at Ole Miss doing doctoral work and my degree was sort of interdisciplinary, and I took a lot of history classes. And, you know, I was used to just, you know, shooting out these papers in English, and then I went to history. And I had to work on it because the way I wrote in English was not the way the professor wanted the history paper written, so it was a shock. And I guess I knew it, you know, in college and graduate work, but whenever I took this on the doctoral level, that's when I really realized it, you know, and took some—I shouldn't have been in there—doctoral level history classes. I was way out of my league.

Terrell: I can remember I went to the University of Mobile, back when it was Mobile College, and I can remember going in and thinking, they're hearing the lectures, and thinking, just wanting to be a sponge and just all of a sudden I had this feeling of well-being inside me. And I was like...this is something else, this is a different world and I like it here. But I can remember walking out of class and other people saying, "What in the

heck was he talking about?” And I was like, “Wait, what? It was this and this and this.” And they would go, “Huh?” So I don’t know if it was just because I was accustomed to—I mean my dad is a genius and so I think I was accustomed to hearing him—academic or whatever you want to say.

Simmons: There must’ve been a sense of well-being.

Terrell: So my...college because of my dad, I think. We knew he knew everything. And my dad taught me how to think because he wouldn’t—we knew he knew the answer, but he wouldn’t tell us. He would ask us questions and make us arrive at the answer on our own. And, you know, at times we were like, “Can’t you just tell me the answer?” And he wouldn’t do it. (William Carey English Faculty Focus Group

Meeting, 2010)

Now these teachers are defining academic discourse as “credence,” which Simmons is indicating is evidence of critical thinking. By “voice” I can only assume Howze is indicating that the history teacher is looking for the historically critical voice along with “problem-posing” and “discovery,” as Terrell indicates. All of their criteria for academic discourse fit what Bloom calls “attributes of creativity” (82). However, beyond one short statement that the EPE writer “proved her point,” there were no examples given of the writer’s logic, voice, or problem posing and discovery, but there were numerous examples of the writer’s ability to use grammar and to organize the paper effectively. What is significant, then, is how the definition of academic discourse is expanded upon outside the context of proficiency testing. Maybe grammar and structure was not a focus for these teachers when they were students because they had mastered these fundamentals and so their own teachers were only looking for higher level skills, but at issue is still the

possibility that the test itself could be what changes the nature of conversation between how teachers see themselves as writers and how teachers see their students as writers.

Although all of the teachers were dismayed at the lack of interest the EPE student seems to show on the exam, in a very real sense with their focus on conventions, they would seem to me to express the same socially-informed opinion as William Pixton, who in “A Contemporary Dilemma: The Question of Standard English” asks scholars to take into account how language operates. Using a real-life example, he points out that a person can speak an informal language among family and friends, but he must be fluent in English in order to speak to members of his trade union, and he must be equipped to use extremely formal English if he is to speak and be heard by a larger audience represented at a trade convention (64). Pixton’s point is obvious: one who knows Standard English from the outset and uses it with family and friends will not have to make that much of a linguistic leap when scaffolding his language to talk to a wider, mainstream audience. However, since a non-Standard English speaking student would have to make a greater leap to be understood by a wider audience (63), Pixton would not agree with The Conference on College Composition and Communication resolution, “The Students’ Right to Their Own Language” and its background statement of 1974 that begins “We affirm the student’s right to his own language—the dialect of his nurture in which he finds his identity and style” (63). Rather, Pixton wants those minority students who want to learn the correct way to write and speak to filter out, if not outright reject, minority discourses. However, teacher observation and Critical Studies literature show us that students often use their home languages to filter the Standard and make sense of it.

Scaffolding to Academic Discourse

Moving from home literacy to academic literacy is seen most closely with the example that Simmons gives when he contrasts school literacy with home literacy:

Simmons: When I think of academic discourse, I think of some basic elements that whether it's literature class, philosophy class or writing, that are consistent in all of them. One is that it's critical, that it thinks critically about things, and the claims that are made by others and the claims that they are making they think critically about. Two is that it's analytic; it breaks down things, it breaks them apart, it looks for hidden assumptions or hidden arguments. And also assumptions in their own thinking, like you were talking about across culture and over generalization. I think it is logical. I think there are certain principles that we can argue, make sense, and certain ones don't. I mean there's coherence and there's contradiction, and they're pretty clear between the two. I think it's empirical that they offer evidence for what they claim in academic discourse. And I was grading a paper earlier today and it was "I feel," "I believe," and, really, I don't care. There was no evidence for anything they were saying other than "I feel" and "I believe." There's a place for that, but in the type paper they were arguing—it was an argumentative paper that they were supposed to be critiquing something, and that's not the place for "I feel" and "I believe." It's the place for "this is the reason why" and "this is the case." (William Carey English Faculty Focus Group Meeting, 2010)

Simmons admits that “There’s a place” for “I believe” and “I feel,” but he does not go on to identify the place as a social community that accepts such rhetoric. Instead, the place refers to a type of writing allowed in the classroom that is considered not argumentative writing. If the students’ emotion-based responses were accepted in light of a social community that is substantial and expects such responses, how much more empowered might those students see themselves if they then learn from teachers that they are right, but just in the wrong context? However, if their community is co-opted or erased and reconstituted in the classroom as a paper, how can they possibly see that they have something of worth to contribute to an academic environment? Simmons is presenting the same image of scaffolding as Pixton, which is to scaffold within the framework of knowing only Standard English and becoming better in Standard English. Another teacher supports his view when she says that students must “support the claims that they make in their writing as well as in their speech,” which is “imperative.” But this teacher also agrees with the type of scaffolding that occurs from non-standard discourse to standard discourse; she begins her imperative dialogue with the comment that although writing often “comes down to” teaching how to write better Standard English, she still agrees with Marks that students would be helped by “discussion in class and teaching students to do the sorts of things” associated with culturally inclusive teaching. When Simmons goes on to explain the trouble that students have working with Standard English, the group then hears in a very direct sense the type of scaffolding that Pixton finds unacceptable:

Simmons: I don’t think most students struggle as much with thinking as they do writing, and I don’t mean that...in any sense, I just mean that they struggle to be able to organize their own thoughts and organize the way

they interact with other thoughts, and if they can't get that under control, then they really struggle when it comes to putting it down on paper in trying to communicate what they're thinking.

Howze: And I think one reason why they struggle with their thinking is because often we don't give them enough opportunity to exercise discourses other than the ones that would compel them to justify and legitimize and give evidence for everything they say. I think there's a kind of scaffold involved in thinking and writing and talking that helps us learn those things as we go, rather than having them required from the beginning. Does that make any sense?

Marks: I think that's where the reflective "why" comes in. You know if you ask students to jump in and suddenly do this very correct academic paper, their thinking becomes real fuzzy and it comes out the "I think" sort of thing. And so many researchers in composition have found that if there is not this reflective writing, type of writing, as a foundation, you know, that you cannot go directly—their formal writing will be very stiff and not much depth to it. (William Carey English Faculty Focus Group Meeting, 2010)

The two senior teachers see discourses, then, as a step toward making sense of how Standard English works. They seem to indicate that such discourse work in the classroom is only to make students aware that switching to the code of Standard English is required at William Carey. This discourse work often takes the form of reflective writing where they may use dialect to think about their topics, but on paper, they must change their thinking in dialect into Standard English.

The social implications of Pixton's view should not be lost on readers. While advocating the value of Standard English over all other non-standard discourses, he inadvertently shows us how valuable language is to identity development. Using his trade union example, Pixton explains how the Standard English in the speaker's community gives one the confidence to try out one's linguistic repertoire with a forgiving audience before moving on to a larger audience. Thus, using Standard English in a community conveys to speakers that speaking/writing is a social act, a lesson they can carry over to the composition classroom. However, cultures that are denied even contemplating the social rewards literacy brings to them from their own communities may be hard pressed to conceive of literacy as a social act. And if they are discouraged from creating an image of community in their heads, they may replace community with the academic institution that they may think sees them as hostile and intolerant, since they are using non-standard discourse in a standard setting. This real or imagined perception could further impede their process of bridging in order to create an understandable text. Academic discourse, then, is the belief that writing is a social, reciprocal act between the writer and the community. The writer is ideally well aware of the benefits she receives from her community as well as the expectations she must meet in order to write to or on behalf of her community. Minority writers who are not allowed to show how nonstandard languages benefit their communities and the expectations languages must meet in order to be understood by their community members often have a harder time transferring their attention to the reward and expectation demanded by the academic expository essay.

Pixton argues that Standard English is considered a universal discourse and is thus the language that is most likely to be heard, so that the message presented by a Standard

speaker or writer is more likely to be taken seriously. Can Black English or foreign languages garner the same attention from a wider audience beyond a community setting?

Pixton answers this question with an example:

The form *dat*, currently the Black English equivalent of *that* and understandable in context, is not excluded from standard English, not because standard speakers consciously oppose *dat*, but because the *that* is a convention: it has been spelled uniformly since the late fourteenth century through new forms that improve communication. At this time, however, the unconventional *dat* decreases communication by calling attention to itself and diverting attention from meaning. This decrease is not caused by the inherent superiority of *that* but by its existence as a convention. Although *dat* may not always be nonstandard, it seems that now its exclusion is based, not on linguistic prejudice, but on a sound convention and the concomitant fact that *dat* hinders communication. The employer, then, rejects applicants who use uncommunicative and unconventional forms because his success depends in part upon effective communication, which in the American world calls for conventional usage. (68-69)

Thus, a site of common ground between students and test proctors is using language by the most expedient route to get what one wants. The same principle applies to Black culture in some situations where the speaker/writer is told “ask for what you are asking for,” which means “use the words that will be listened to in order to produce a rapid but good quality response.” Therefore, students who are attempting to pass essay-based proficiency exams should know that academic discourse is Standard English because it is

universally respected as the discourse of high prestige to which audiences will listen seriously in order to consider whether they will change their beliefs or respond to a call to action. Students should consider using the language most likely to be heard, at least until test designers and English departments make clear that the test values non-standard discourse.

Reconceptualizing the Role of Audience

Expanding the notion of audience to one the student has in mind may help meet his or her psychological and emotional need for nonstandard discourses in classrooms. An opposing argument to the Student's Rights Resolution highlights the value of how language creates identity and aids in identity development. In Allen Smith's "No One has a Right to His Own Language," he argues that the focus of pedagogy should be the great works of literature and of popular literature that is well written and that "Teachers, by definition, are custodians of the past," and so "our particular role in any society is to gather and disseminate the standards and values of the past for the coming generation in our respective chosen fields" (75). This past will allow the student "to speak and write 'well'" and requires "high language skills," which will take the student away from his primary identity since "his education at my hands will offer him a slim, short-lived chance to escape from his own limited time and place in this present world to a mythical world composed of some of the biggest and most exciting ideas which have come down to us from the past" (75). Smith also associates this past with "a civilized society" and the "specialized, abstract, dated world...where the greatest proportion of human genius resides" (79). This past Smith speaks of is directly linked to Standard English, a past that Standard English only students can easily identify with, imitate as Smith calls for, and take pride in. Likewise, Geneva Smitherman says in "Toward Educational Linguistics

for the First World” in *The Hope and The Legacy* an awareness of black culture is necessary for the identity development of students in a classroom, because:

Language intertwines with culture and is one of the basic defining characteristics of humans. Through speech interaction in which language is manifest, human beings participate in the collective creation of order and bring understanding to life. To teach and learn the structure/semantic/socio-cultural/historical/political dimensions of Black English, is, in fact, to teach and learn about black people. And the acquisition of such knowledge is, for black people, the first step toward liberation. (100)

Smitherman goes on to claim that an acceptance of “black community identity” would lead to a psychological acceptance of self (*Hope and The Legacy* 100). Thus, the self-confident student, whether white or black, tends to write from a position of authority rather than lack self-confidence. Both Smith and Smitherman posit that this self-confidence begins with home literacy practices. Moreover, in both the Smith and Smitherman explanations, a connection to community as audience will produce a more knowledgeable and forthright individual. Smitherman says this person becomes a participant in the “collective creation of order and bring[s] understanding to life” (*Hope and The Legacy* 100). The teachers in the focus group also pondered the role of audience in student writing and whether or not it shuts down or muddles their creativity or whether an expansion of audience beyond the academy is helpful:

Simmons: ...but they’re coming in with various backgrounds, various—and whether or not we admit it or not—various forms of English that are coming into our classes, whether it be international students or not, I mean

I speak a form of Southern English that doesn't deal anything with standard English and I have to write differently for academic [papers].

And there's always disjointed discourses that we're trying to get them to master in trying to figure out where we want them to be and how to get them there, I think, is sometimes very difficult. But our audience will solve that for us because they write according to their discipline but...

Levin: But that audience won't....

Simmons: That's about right, sometimes it causes as much problems as it does solve. (William Carey English Faculty Focus Group Meeting, 2010)

What Simmons and Levin bring up is that even a strict adherence to an academic audience in their discipline cannot unify all the various "disjointed" discourses signifying multiple audiences to them. Moreover, the single academic audience in one's discipline, which represents the historic discourse of that particular discipline, may limit the number of relevant points the writer could have made had he been challenged by the needs of the multiple audiences. There is also the related issue of writing that fails for inadequate interaction with the Standard English Only audiences. The group spends a great deal of time showing the frustration this causes the student writer:

Marks: I also have to tell, I have to say to my students sometimes uh, in certain papers, say they're writing an essay based on literature and, and they want, maybe it's a relevance type paper, which I will allow in some cases but I have to say to them it's OK with me, if you make brief personal references in your paper, better watch it cause it may not be OK in another professor's class. And this is not a matter of, as far as I'm

concerned, a matter of right and wrong, or effectiveness or ineffectiveness, it's I think, a matter of academic preference. I don't know any other way to put it but if you're writing a paper where, a brief reference to yourself is, well done and it's relevant to the topic, I don't have a problem with it but some professors...so sometimes you have to prepare them for different possibilities in the same academic setting or in different settings.

Terrell: In fact, maybe, where we need to go is adaptation. They have trouble adapting their writing to anything because "It's Ms. so and so says."

Howze: Or changing their language and your know I talk a lot about code switching and changing their language and, you know, personal reference, like in Methods of Teaching English. I have asked them to write a philosophy of teaching English and I allow it there because it's their philosophy, you know, at teaching English. But you know life, if it's a paper in the Romantic Age-

Simmons: Literature, no reason for it there.

Levin: I was gonna say the analogy that I use is that on the first day, I always encourage them to ask questions when they're writing, you know, in different, you know, in different circumstances they're not familiar with because you, in many ways, the first paper that you write for someone is like a first date, you don't know what they're looking for, if they're going to respond to your ideas the way that you probably want.

Brookter: You said Dr. Howze, you use code switching and changing language in your classes. Does anyone else use some kind of difference between home literacy and school literacy?

Howze: Uh-huh.

Brookter: Ok, what prompted you to do that?

Howze: Well, I teach Advanced Grammar, and I teach all of the grammar courses so naturally, you know, like that 390 that we're doing now, traditional grammar, and also in Methods of Teaching English when we talk about teaching grammar and on a graduate level, I teach the summer theories and Methods of teaching grammar, you know, we get into code switching and the fact that you know this is something that you really do teach you have to teach students. I tell students I don't go home and talk to Buzbe the way I'm talking to them—we talk about the way you talk at home is not necessary and that's really what a lot of our students have to learn you know, they come from one environment and then they come this academic setting and they have to, to switch, you know, I have a lot of students you know, and I know ya'll do to that when they're first starting out at Carey. They may not use their verbs correctly for example, you know and I know you, you get this.

Marks: I started doing this with Development One just for that same reason because they don't realize that they _____, they're different demands for different situations so I would usually use the, you know, the analogy that you've gotten a ticket. Write a letter to mom, write a letter to your best friend and write a letter to parking and once they do those, we

look at the differences in those _____, you know, they know what to do they just don't realize that it's required.

Terrell: Till it's over.

Howze: Yeah, right. And I teach 310, Pedagogical grammar and we talk a lot about, you know, code switching.

Levin: With Developmental English, it's just convincing them they can't do it. So if you take something like texting, right. How did you learn how to text? What are rules, they always like to talk about texting and then show them how that transfers to, ok, well academic discourses, is I feel, the same way. You gotta learn the rules, you got to learn the language and you got to learn to do it.

Howze: That's good.

Terrell: They're able to do it subconsciously.

Simmons: Yeah, and just to show them.

Dr. Howze: They're just that conscience of it.

Levin: I'm like, look, you've already learned how to, how to text and that's a very complicated language that you've mastered and I have-

Terrell: And you, you code switch, you code switch when you go from texting to writing an essay, you know, so they do it naturally and they just don't, they haven't identified it as code switching.

Simmons: Just make them aware of that they can do it.

Marks: With, with writing though, and switching codes and usage standards, it's not always as simple as adapting your style. I don't think to send a text because there are real issues of usage that, that are not always

clear in student's head. Their mother tongues just don't automatically shift to the so called standard automatically. I think something more in depth well, I think that's why, why it's so important, and, and conferencing, and all kinds of practice, all kinds of practicing with language, talking in the classroom, listening carefully. Student's just don't, the way we learn language is that we hear people talking in a certain way and we see people writing, if they write at all in a certain way and going and spending an hour in an English class, twenty times in a semester is not going to make a big difference in what we already internalized from the time we were children. So I think I'm hearing—I agree with everything that's said. I'm just trying to say I guess what's common knowledge but I'm just trying to articulate it for my own good but it's not as simple as just "I'm going to code switch" because I'm writing this essay, you know, does that make sense?

Howze: I think it's a process.

Marks: Yes.

Howze: I think a really good example. I have seen English majors, you know, they will start out, you know, like a sophomore and they have some serious issues with their language as an English major and I've had, I've had them in class after class, after class and I do a lot of, you know, power points and oral reports as well as writing and I'm thinking of one particular English Major now and I have seen her grow and change and it's not something that happens in one, three hour course but it's something that happens, you know, over three or four years. I just don't

think it's, it's not instantaneous, because you're talking about eighteen years or twenty years, or thirty years however old the student is, they've been doing that language for that many years and just suddenly have that three hour course. It's not going to make that much difference but it's through the process and, and, you know, in linguistics or in grammar, you know, you make student's aware of something and they may type a correction; and so you get that, you know, they go through and they hyper correct, for example, some people, you know, use the subjective as the object of the preposition because it sounds more correct, doesn't it? You know between you and I instead of between you and me, and so it's a process and in the process, they make mistake and they hyper correct before they get through to understand in order to code switch. Code switching does happen automatically and I think all of us have gotten—or older enough experience that we do code switching without realizing it.

Simmons: Some of it's communal too. Some of it's communal. We make writing such a problem affair sometimes, you know, with peer reviews, you know a lot of times what they will do is swap papers with [their] buddies who are in the same codes that they are in and they all read the same in; cause I will have athletes in my classes and they tend to swap the same papers and tend to make the same mistakes rather than have someone else and the way we break free. My mother tongue, as I mentioned earlier, is southern English. It's not Standard English. I'll use slang in a heartbeat and I'll use inappropriate grammar all the time. The way I learn not to do that though is multiple communities being exposed

to those and grading and writing and having feedback and having other people, having an aunt always go ‘ it’s not that, it’s this’ and this and that so it’s such a communal aspect to writing. I feel that a lot of my students are reluctant to make that public because they’re scared sometimes to have peer, they’re really resistant to peer review sometimes you can see, we’re going to do some peer review, editing review.

Terrell: Which, when you come right down to it, I think that [is] behind the impulse to get rid of the EPE in the first place, they had no problems with the computer proficiency exam. (William Carey English Faculty Focus Group Meeting, 2010)

Although we may want to create a idealized, unified academic audience that has a definite way of hearing and reading information, an ideal that if realized would make our jobs far easier, the group discussion shows the impossibility of this notion. Marks shows how she allows personal writing in a public paper in her classroom, but that students had better ask if this kind of writing is acceptable in another classroom. In essence, then, Marks highlights the shifting nature of academic audience; it changes depending on who the readers are and what they believe constitutes good writing. An even more significant point to emerge from this discussion of audience is the notion that audience is communal. Activities the group listed for developing the student’s sense of self include talking, conferencing, practicing language, peer review and editing review, and even what goes beyond the classroom, since Marks says they need feedback from their outside community in order to address or answer to an academic audience. The Marks comment and the Terrell comment sum up well their exploratory discussion of audience, and Howze suggests that sometimes it is the people to whom one is closest in one’s

community of origin that can help one understand what belongs in paper addressed to a wider audience. Terrell astutely finds that the collaborative nature of writing is where the test falls short; due to its academic association with the dominant or hegemonic discourse of Standard English, it fails to consider the communal nature of writing that is often needed for a student to be a successful writer. Without feedback on the test, many students are left imagining their audience to be the strictest of grammarians rather than an academic audience with the same preferences and values of English that they have. In other words, had they had Marks in mind when writing the test, then maybe they would have strategically and successfully used personal references in an argumentative paper.

The importance of home audience feedback is that it can permit minority students first to see themselves as strong personas before they write strong texts especially since the English language itself may otherwise work against them. Educator, activist, and actor Ossie Davis shows the importance of scaffolding from home to school when he writes that a quick review of *Roget's Thesaurus of the English Language* shows that the word “whiteness” has 134 synonyms, 44 of which are favorable and pleasing to contemplate such as “purity,” cleanness, immaculateness, bright, shiny, ivory, and fair. The word “blackness” has 120 synonyms, 60 of which are distinctly unfavorable, and none of them even mildly positive. Some of these words are, blot, blotch, smut, ...obscure, dingy, murky, low-toned, threatening” (5). He concludes that since thinking is sub vocal speech, the English language itself prioritizes race. Following this line of reasoning, he argues that whites in general and teachers in particular fail to allow for language inclusivity when they deem black students as inferior based on language, because these teachers are locked to an English language, which speaks of inferiority. Blacks, he says, become “inverted racists” due to this response in that they can react

negatively and hostilely to such responses of inferiority. Thus, he argues that English be democratized, that is, that “teachers...reconstruct the English language” (5). The Students’ Rights resolution, then, understands that words stigmatize students, so the resolution attempts to advocate for dialect use in an effort to change teachers’ perception of students. However, a change of perception does not change the language itself. So another way to democratize the English language is to let in the views of the community of origin for students as they attempt to counter racist connotations with language in more positive and culturally-specific manners. An example would be the work that Jesse Jackson has done in reconstituting the word and image of *Black* to *African-American* (Martin 83-107).

Academic discourse, then, is an identity marker of mainstream values. Given that it is so, the minority student test-taker can either take on the persona of the mainstream culture, which is the *assimilationist* method and a *site of common ground method* or the test-taker can insert nonstandard cultural references in place of standardized conventions. The most troubling aspect of the Students’ Rights resolution debate is also the most troubling issue in general in the composition and education fields, which is the language and logic issue. Some scholars believe that students cannot think well in their dialects, whereas advocates of second language learning claim that students must think in their language of nurture first before ever translating their thoughts to Standard English for a wider audience. For his part, Pixton contends that student reliance on nonstandard dialect depresses the intellectual ability to detect important nuances of Standard English. He finds that:

Some may believe that the communicative function of language preserves itself precisely and that therefore students can fully understand spoken and

written standard English although they cannot write it. But the understanding of standard English possessed by a student who cannot write it is usually deficient. This student, accustomed to casual talk instead of precise writing, is liable at best to miss distinctions in a communication and at worst to misunderstand it. At the level of grammatical restriction and nonrestriction, he may believe that this sentence, ‘Soldiers who are exposed to danger should receive good pay,’ means the same as this one: ‘Soldiers, who are exposed to danger, should receive good pay.’ And because meaning is greatly affected by word choice, this student might accept the following sentence without objection: ‘One obstacle, lack of skill in the use of standard American English, has increasingly been recognized as a major contributing factor to the success of a child beginning his formal education.’ If this student learns precision through writing, he may see through obscurity and misstatement (and political speeches). (64-65)

In “The Shuffling Speech of Slavery: Black English,” J. Mitchell Morse insists that “Everybody who has ever corrected freshman themes knows that a limited vocabulary and a limited command of syntax limit the possibilities of thought...:Black English, like silent-majority white English, lacks the vocabulary and the syntactic resources for thought of even moderate complexity” (46).

The rhetoric of testing, then, incorporates the philosophical and practical tenets of academic discourse, with which it aligns itself. Thus, although students write nonstandard journal entries, nonstandard answers to classroom exercises, nonstandard drafts, and sometimes even nonstandard final papers, they must be told that English

proficiency exams, which by their very nature are looking to measure a student's competence in English only, cannot be written in nonstandard English unless features of that English are carefully negotiated. Consequently, composition teachers must admit that the test does not measure the classroom instruction of autonomous self-expression, but rather it measures a common response to Standard English. Students need to be told directly that academic discourse is a social act, reflects the syntax of Standard English, connects to the community of mainstream knowledge-makers, and continues to support the need for information this community desires. Because it values the monologic voice, academic discourse expects the personality of the writer to emerge from the text strong and authoritative, and language use is associated with intelligence.

In fact, Allen Smith proclaims that no one can write the way that he or she may want when one takes audience into consideration, because—as he explains in “No One has a Right to His Own Language,” language is a reciprocal act:

The use of language is not an individual but a social act, particularly when the individual takes the trouble to set his words down on paper. Writing is not a form of self-expression, and anyone who teaches that it is doomed to failure from the start. One of the great battles which takes place at the outset of every freshman comp course is to convince each student that there is an audience out there and that he or she must write for that audience at every step of the development: mechanically, grammatically, logically, and aesthetically. (73)

Beverly Moss would acknowledge Smith's stance as a site of common ground for African-American students. Although African-American church text is a community text in which the minister and congregation constantly switch roles as listeners and

speakers, the need to meet audience expectation in the oral church context is the same experienced by students who need to address an academic audience in essay form. In her words:

The ministers and congregations recognize that for the ministers to be persuasive, they must understand and meet the expectations of their audience and community. They must use rhetorical devices that will be meaningful to the audience. The same principle holds true for students learning academic written literacy....In other words, each model recognizes the communicative purposes of their texts and participants.
(156-157)

Just as the congregational situation implies a certain kind of audience, essayist writing implies an audience that wants very clinical prose, a prose that keeps a degree of distance or objectivity even with personal narrative. To be too personal on a standardized exam is often seen as carelessness because the audience expects more attention to be given to the subject matter and the purpose of the story rather than to the story itself. Take for example the test prompt and student response on one of our English Proficiency Exams (EPE). The prompt reads: Write about a change in your own attitude or perception of something. Explain not only how this change occurred, but also why it happened and its effects. In this essay, you may want to explore the relationship between reality and perception—how the perception of something affects the real thing. For example, how has your attitude toward your parents, your spouse, other family member(s), education, work, immigration, sports, politics, or other races changed in recent years?

Here is a passage of the essay response. The author, Jake is explaining that he used to agree with the popular idea that single mothers are the only one responsible for

the care of their children, until he realized that single fathers with sole custody of their children do, in fact, exist:

I did all the things new dads are suppose to do. I got up at night with her, to[ok] her to and from the babysitter, changed diapers, and carried her places to give mom a break. Then all this came crashing down[....] My wife confessed she was having an affair. This tore me up inside. How could this happen? Upon her confession, she wanted to leave and stay with her mother, leaving the child with me. (Sample student essay #2)

The point of his essay is that single fathers do exist and that once he became a single father, he had new found knowledge and respect for the work that all single mothers perform on a daily basis. What hurts the student here is his intense focus on confession rather than expression. Audience members do not need to know why his wife leaves, but they do need to know she just left. And an audience begins to see how much he has internalized this trauma and is working to figure out what happened with his question “How could this happen?” How it happened and what he feels about her withdrawal is not the purpose of the paper. The purpose is to explain how perception and reality can mutually exclude each other. The perception he has of his wife before the confession is not developed beyond a statement that all people expect single mothers to be the ones to take care of their children. However, the deeper purpose of the piece seems to be that gender stereotypes position women into motherly roles as a duty, an obligation that he agreed with until he ended up with custody. Clearly, then, the why of the paper never is addressed, such as in, why are women considered the primary caregivers even in two parent households? He does not answer these questions, but rather his story alone is supposed to be intimate enough to carry the message that he is aware of gender

discrimination. Test readers in our department have labeled this type of confessional relationship story a “baby mama drama,” which does not rate highly because the story itself is expected to work as the analysis. Moreover, as Edith Babin and Kimberly Harrison explain that this is writer-based prose where the focus is on the writer and his own expectations rather than reader-based prose where the writer tailors his piece to fit the expectations of the public (228). The end of his piece includes statements on how single mothers should be treated better and how when he sees single mothers he tries to help them. Thus, his perception that single mothers have to take care of their kids morphs into the beliefs that single mothers do not have it easy and that he is obligated to help make the job easier for any single mother with whom he comes in contact. His perception does not expand to recognizing that one reality of the single mother situation is that the stereotype should be dismantled so that there is more gender equality. As the chair of the English department, Dr. Thomas Richardson stated after a meeting on writing standards, narratives must have “resolution” (William Carey Faculty Meeting, 2009). He did not mean an end to the story for he went on to define resolution as the justification or purpose for writing, which is “abstract” in nature or points toward “larger issues” (William Carey Faculty Meeting, 2009).

Another site of common ground that has emerged from Moss’s study of African American church culture is the “ministers’ use of textual evidence” (156) that helps ministers persuade church members that their preaching is valid and well-grounded in facts, and students can discuss this so that they will be more likely to apply this concept to expository writing. Moss explains:

These ministers’ use of textual evidence, for instance, may be useful in helping students understand how to integrate written sources as evidence

within their academic texts. The sermons also provide good examples of texts that integrate different types of evidence within the text: textual evidence, personal narratives, historical evidence, and so on. (156)

Minority students and white students alike tend to shy away from using any textual references in their essay exams. Those who do refer to works of literature, art as text, song titles or lyrics or other forms of published works tend to score higher on the test than those who do not use textual evidence. Mary is an African-American student who begins her EPE this way:

“Life’s Experience”

I use to wonder why my life was so messed up. Why did majority of my friends betrayed me. Why my father neglected me, and why I had to lose my grandmother; the best thing that life has ever offered me. Now that I am older I’ve realized it is my challenging experience that makes me understand this world. (Sample student essay #3)

The introduction provides no clue about the prompt, though fortunately this student had labeled her response by the test question number. Many essay test prep books and essay writing as a genre in English textbooks such as *Norton* and *Prentice Hall* explain that changing the test question as the first part of the test answer anchors the text and works as textual evidence.

Her prompt was the following:

Helen Keller’s essay, “The Day Language Came into my Life,” describes the influence of Anne Mansfield Sullivan on her life. Keller writes, “I am filled with wonder when I consider the immeasurable contrast between the two lives....” Joyce Maynard said, “The fact is that there’s no

understanding the future without the present, and no understanding where we are now without a glance, at least, to where we have been.”

Write about a memory. You may recall a brief event, a person, or a place as an example **to illustrate a point** (emphasis theirs). Your purpose is to remember experiences so you can better understand your world. Note:

Please do not use your religious experience for this essay. (Memory prompt)

The student could have anchored her essay by repeating part of the prompt, in “Some experiences help people understand their worlds, and I too have also had those type of experiences. One experience that has helped me make sense of my world was_____.” Moreover, a reference to Helen Keller’s work in the test text would have worked well in showing a connection to public discourse rather than to private musings.

In both examples of the above referenced exams, an argument can be made that narrative is being defined by the student according to cultural conventions outside of the dominant culture’s standards. In the first example, Jake is practicing a closeness to his readers in order to build immediate trust between writer and reader, and he permits a high level of intimacy in order to garner sympathy for his audience. In African-American communities such personal intimacy is valued as capturing the listener’s or reader’s interest and as being necessary if the writer expects both sympathy and assistance with solving the problem. Mary, on the other hand, starts mid-stream with the experiences that have changed her world. She employs a stream-of-consciousness technique that starts in the middle of the action. This kind of introduction to how life experiences have changed the speaker often works in African-American communities, where a person can

move back and forth between the past and the present in order to explain the present.

This is not the rhetorical pattern of flashback and then a move forward to an interpretation of the present, but rather it is a shift in point of view (Moss 150-155; Smitherman 54). This shift in point view can sound like two papers are being written simultaneously. Thus, on the one hand, Mary writes about the tragedies that have befallen her, although she was supposed to pick one tragedy or event to write about. Her other part of the text, which seems to be the point of her paper, is that life also has positive moments.

Moss finds that the last trait of common ground between African-American sermonic tradition and the essayist academic tradition is that both texts value a “beginning, middle, and end” in texts and a “main point that the rhetor is trying to persuade the audience to accept” (156). Showing students these church texts and comparing them to formal essays should help them understand how they can transition effectively in a text in order to delineate a beginning, middle, and end. However, a beginning, middle, and end with clearly defined topic sentences can be lost on some students because precise language with words that persuade audiences to listen can seem too direct and even rude to them. In the same strain that African-Americans are taught to be respectful to their elders and Asian Americans are required to speak and write indirectly to those they consider are superior to them. Take for example, the African-American who was asked to respond to the Helen Keller example:

“Memories of My Life”

When I think back over my life there are many memories that comes to mind. Such as some of the things I had to do as a child. I think of the memories of the old house I lived in, the car and truck I rode in as a

child. I think of the work I did, the choirs we had to do, and our play time, I remember how hard it was to grow up with a twin sister. I look back on how our parent tried to bring us up in the right way. I also remember what it was like having a big family of sisters and brothers. My life was not good. Thank to God he made the different

Some of the things I had to do when I was growing up were: Cook breakfast, dinner, and supper. Now I know that was a good thing, because now now [sic] I know how to cook. I was only six years old. I stood on a number two tub in front of the old wood burning stove. This tub was like a foot tub but larger. It had two handles that was shaped like a small “D.” I was larger than a foot tub. The same tub was used to take a bath.

(Sample student essay #4)

Frances cannot find it in her to directly blame her parents for her childhood. Nor can she go so far as to label what makes her childhood bad—is it neglect, poverty, or even abuse that upsets her? In her culture, a respect for the elderly, her parents, will not allow her to directly place blame and confront her situation directly. Without a direct confrontation of the problem, she lacks a point, and so, her entire piece causes her to give example after example of a hard childhood, that she then reverses like she does with her cooking example by making it positive rather than a negative. She would have to be told to confront her situation directly so that her words have power, so that she can give an order to her argument, and so that she has a definite point to make which other people could relate.

Sites of conflict, then, would be every instance when students misunderstand what academic discourse demands of them, such as language that will be heard, a strong

identity, a major point that is defended, and so on. Students who are shown how their attention to these same features is valued in their own communities may be able to make the transition to standard academic discourse. However, if they rely on some features that only their cultures value, such as indirect discourse, then they would have to know through a study of language practices that mainstream readers would not be receptive to such features, since they vary so much from their SE home literacy. This is not to discount their worldviews, because they can combine some of the primary features of Academic English discourse in their papers with their nonstandard rhetorical patterns such as call and response, and shifts in voice such as playing an aggressive figure in the text and then playing the fearless figure in the text (Smitherman, *Talkin and Tesifin* 104,157-7).

In addition to the use of nonstandard rhetorical patterns, students must be made aware of the role of narrative in order to write well for Standardized English Proficiency Exams. Judith Summerfield, in “Is There a Life in This Text? Reimagining Narrative,” calls compositionists to problematize the narrative in these post-Saussurian, post-Freudian, postmodern constructivist moments where we seek to understand what is unnatural about asking students to write what should come naturally to them in narrative form (180).

Narrative is, in fact, a “representation of an event[that] is always belated, always deferred, always after the event; that memory in language unsettles the already told; that each telling tells differently; that there are multiple positioning or versions; that the textual conventions of fiction and nonfiction must be called into question (181).

Specifically, we ask students to tell about a memorable event as it actually happened, and to tell it truthfully. She finds this type of assignment as a general part of the college curriculum from assignments in “countless composition courses and textbooks” to

“writing samples collected at the beginning of semesters” to “proficiency exams” (182).

Summerfield finds that not only is the truth relative in narrative, since students must channel their personal experiences to fit the assignment requirements even if in reality they did not process the experiences to be life-changing or challenging or what the assignment demands, but that what teachers do with such narratives is even more problematic. She argues that as teachers, “we distinguish the life from the text, the events being represented, the ‘what happened,’ from the procedures for representing what happened—the textual options.” We ask students, then, for their texts, not their lives. The distinction is crucial: the discourse is not the event” (183). Since the way the writer presents his or her life and argues a point is of higher import than the story itself, writers should be made to understand this difference so that they provide only enough details to make their points rather than saturate a narrative with an abundance of details in their attempt to get every part of the story “right.” Making this point clear to students can then set the stage for class discussion on the limits and possibilities of language to create the persona they wish to convey to an audience. The narrative as untruth would, in her opinion and mine, liberate students to become manipulators of text and voices with critical viewpoints (184). They will begin to see that narratives do not represent a truth, but multiple truths that can come from a slight restructuring of the texts. Many of my graduate school colleagues and I have tried the technique of having students write narratives with a change in viewpoint or the addition of dialogue and other rhetorical patterns, and students have found that the “moral to the story” changes. Thus, the test-taker, once enlightened that narrative is not an absolute but a genre capable of language play may be more likely to take control of the text and answer the test question successfully. Here is a look at a student, Jody, who thinks narrative is an absolute, so that

her details must be exact in order for her to put her finger on the pulse of exactly who she is in a timeless sense rather than her painting a still picture of a moment in time for the purpose of the test question:

An Expectation and its Reality

During my childhood years people always expected the worst for me, when the reality was prosperity. They judged my character because I was a hyperactive child, and based my whole life on my childish ways. Their expectations envisioned me struggling with lots of children without education, living with my parents; however, I'm totally opposite. Negative expectations gave me the inspiration to become a positive, motivated, and strong individual.

As a child my childish ways gave reason for some people to dislike me. I always drew attention by acting silly, showing affection, and hanging over anyone around me. People expected aggravation when I entered the room, yet in reality I was just a active loveable child.

Growing up expecting love, but not recieving it made me Love more. Although others expectations were negative; however it made me the person I am today. Since I'm grown I often look back over my life to help me realize that everything I thought was negative, caused pain made me a stronger, yet wiser person. My expectations are imposed from visions that God has given me; and the reality is being manifested for everyone to see. (Sample student essay #5)

Anna had two readers for this essay, and they both failed her, not for her grammar and mechanics, but because she is trying to pin down her personality in absolutist terms. In

her mind, the test question on compare and contrast an expectation and its reality, the question is a dichotomy and so her answer must be one also. Thus she cannot be both lovable and disagreeable at the same time and tell how both are empowering traits. For example, she could have told a story where she had to disagree about letting someone cheat off her test so that the person would not suffer in the long run. She could have argued that by being disagreeable she was lovable because she saved him a worst fate later. Or she could have plotted a course where her lovable trait is both expected of her and a reality that she then later contrast a moment when she stepped out of character and acted disagreeable. However, because the test question is written in absolutist terms, and narratives are taught to be true stories that are ultra-accurate, then she is left never anchoring both of her sides into an actual story, probably because in reality she does not define herself by two distinctive categories, nor do the people around her. She fails, then, because she does not have a clearly defined point, but instead, she has a character analysis that drifts.

Closing the Gap Between Teacher Perception of Language, Standards, and Written Assessment

Standardized proficiency tests stand at the intersection between the “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” resolution’s definition of academic discourse and its opponents’ refutation of the resolution based on their belief in academic discourse as Standard English. Each side defines English differently and either definition has a direct effect on the student test-taker. If students ignore the conventions of Standard Academic English and only use nonstandard dialect in formal papers, they risk not being heard. However, if they incorporate nonstandard dialect features into Standard English Proficiency Exams, they will have to be well aware as to why they would do so and how

to do so because they will have to negotiate such a use by mixing the discourses so that the Standard helps the nonstandard reach a very public audience beyond the writer's community.

Test theorists in composition emphasize how Proficiency Exams, Placement Exams, and Exit Exams are designed to measure the instruction that goes on in the composition classroom. The basic standard objectives for most freshman-level and sophomore-level English composition classes tend to be along the same lines: students must be able to write clearly; they must present a focus and an argument; they must use persuasive strategies, and they should be able to comprehend their readings and find and use scholarly materials in an ethical manner. How the objectives are achieved, however, varies among teachers. Traditional composition teachers who forefront modes of writing, grammar, and mechanics have classrooms and students most closely aligned with standardized proficiency exams. However, nontraditional composition teachers who encourage alternative discourse practices in their classrooms are farthest away from the objectives implied by standardized proficiency exams. This reality can only be changed when both types of teachers realize that students have multiple reasons for writing. Moreover, an interchange in classrooms on language learning and literacy practices would clarify for minority writers what college-level academic discourse is supposed to be so that they succeed in class, on assessments, and beyond graduation. Thus, the issues that the Carey teachers raise in the focus group could set the stage for a new form of testing based on a well articulated theoretical framework. They admit that writing is difficult on many levels: academic audiences change based on the audience's value system of what is effective writing, writing can be discipline-specific, and there is more than one way to write. This indication of the difficulty of writing suggests a form of

written evaluation that has different audiences for each test question or multiple audiences for a single test question, so that the student writer can choose that which best highlights his thinking skills. Next, the student may be able to create his own audience based on the material and interaction he has had in his major, where he has been taught what type of writing is expected in his discipline. We readers then would have to either play the role of professionals in his discipline or have members of his discipline read his writing. The harder concept to grasp, raised not only by some members of the group but also by both Smith and Smitherman, is that if members of the home community help students analyze situations and present the information for a larger audience while also helping them retain their cultural/political stances, why can we not read an alternative discourse paper that is attempting to reach a Standard English Only audience? Some members of the focus group do see the contact of outside groups as valuable in helping students code-switch and understand how language works.

What is also relevant to testing is that the teachers themselves were evaluated when they were students as to their ability to use evidence, have a strong voice, and explore and problem-solve in writing. If these were the stakes in their success or failure in the classroom when they were students, why are they not rated as highly, if not higher than, the grammar and structural organization that was the primary focus of the EPE? A change of criteria to the higher level critical thinking skills that the group values may, in combination with a value in diversity, allow the dialect writer to pass. The dialect writer in this case would do two things: she would use dialect strategically to connect to her culture and its audience expectations and she would use the conventions of the academic community and their prioritizing of evidence, voice, and discovery as good writing. A single proficiency test could not encompass all of these ways of writing, but a portfolio

could handle such multi-literate texts. However, the portfolio would be just as reductive as the single test assessment unless teachers change their perspective and pedagogies to include a more complex, diverse, and contradictory notion of academic discourse.

CHAPTER IV

KILLER DICHOTOMIES THAT EXIST WITHIN POST-PROCESS CLASSROOMS
AND ON PROFICIENCY EXAMS

*Everyone teaches the process of writing, but everyone does not teach the **same** process. [emphasis original]*
 --James Berlin, "Contemporary Composition: The Major Pedagogical Theories" (1982)

Standardization in testing should be reviewed very closely by scholars and teachers in composition because of how it defines and shapes the way we view what college English means and how we portray this view to our students. This chapter looks at how the English Proficiency Exam is caught in a theoretical impasse I call a *killer dichotomy*. The impasse is that the field itself emphasizes multiple possibilities for English, yet the language of the test in many ways restricts what academic English can do. The second dichotomy that this chapter raises is how varying descriptions of English by departments other than English is not replicated on the Carey Proficiency Exams by students. Moreover, this chapter would not be complete without exploring actual student test responses to both the Composition field's theoretical dichotomy and the discipline-specific dichotomy.

The Process Theory Dichotomy

Compositionist James Berlin makes obvious that process theory is the context composition teachers use to frame their classrooms. In his article, "Contemporary Composition: The Major Pedagogical Theories," he argues that process is defined four different ways by four distinctive groups, which are the Neo-Aristotelians or Classicists, the Positivists or Current-traditionalists, the Neo-Platonists or Expressionists, and the New Rhetoricians, whom he calls "separate units" (766). Each theoretical perspective of

process determines how "writer, reality, audience, and language have been defined and related so as to form a distinct world construct with distinct rules for discovering and communicating knowledge" and how "this epistemic complex makes for specific directives about invention, arrangement, and style (or prewriting, writing, and rewriting) ("Contemporary Composition" 766). What is important here is that each theory of process is valued according to degrees, and the degree to which process is valued becomes the center of a teacher's pedagogy. Process theory determines the task situation the student writer will write within the classroom, and most importantly, this view of process is one that he may draw upon as he approaches the proficiency exam.

For the Classicists, the degree to which process is associated with reflection and revision is of lower value than the process of form. Reality can only be communicated through "syllogistic reasoning, the system of logic that Aristotle himself developed and refined" (Berlin, "Contemporary Composition" 767). Truth about a subject, then, can only be expressed through a very systematic use of proofs and examples. In terms of arrangement and style, Aristotle advocated "rational development" and a "rationalistic view of language" (Berlin, "Contemporary Composition" 768). In contrast to this Aristotelian basis, Current-traditional Rhetoric goes back only to the eighteenth-century and Scottish Common Sense Realism, a realism that "denies the value of the deductive method—syllogistic reasoning—in arriving at knowledge. Truth is instead discovered through induction alone. It is the individual sense impression that provides the basis on which all knowledge can be built" (Berlin, "Contemporary Composition" 769). Berlin goes on to posit in a subsequent article, "The Rhetoric and Ideology of the Writing Classroom," that an offshoot of Current-traditional Rhetoric is cognitive theory. Cognitive rhetoric is both scientific and managerial in nature. According to its adherents,

he argues, student writing is goal-directed based on personal interests the students want to pursue. The students unfold their goals on paper, use strategies to help them articulate their goals, and finalize their papers by showing that they have attained their goals. They also use heuristics for when they are hindered from being able to communicate their goals on paper. “Writing becomes, as Flower’s textbook indicates, just another instance of ‘problem-solving processes people use every day,’ most importantly the processes of experts, such as ‘master chess players, inventors, successful scientists, business managers and artists’” (Flowers qtd. in Berlin, “Rhetoric and Ideology” 481). These authoritative, straightforward texts assume that for every problem there is a solution or for every goal pursued there is an end, which means that the conclusions to these student texts would be final without open-ended questioning or indecision on the part of any writers. Berlin states, “It is possible, however, to see this rhetoric as being eminently suited to appropriation by the proponents of a particular ideological stance, a stance consistent with the modern college’s commitment to preparing students for the world of corporate capitalism” (“Rhetoric and Ideology” 482). Moreover, “for cognitive rhetoric, the real is the rational” (Berlin, “Rhetoric and Ideology” 482). Therefore, “The purpose of writing is to create a commodified text...that belongs to the individual and has exchange value—‘problem solving turns composing into a goal-directed journey—writing my way to where I want to be’”(Clines qtd. in Berlin 483). Thus, this theory promotes the notion that arrangement of a text, the development of a text, and even its sentence structure will ultimately give the student writer the “answer” or “answers” that solve the issue that the writer’s text raises. In other words, the structure of a text will provide the logic needed to make the content readable and understandable to an audience. Many current-traditional scholars and teachers, therefore, value the process of form or structure of the text over the

content. Due to their emphasis on organization, development, word choice, and sentence structure, English proficiency exams seem mostly to fit this model of the formal, managerial, commodified text.

The Expressivists, however, value primarily how one develops content, and the value of form as secondary. Following the tenets of Plato, the Expressivists believe that the private, personal voice is necessary in the discovery of truth. Although absolute truth can never be fully expressible, approximations of it can be communicated through the writer's reflections on feelings about experiences (Berlin, "Contemporary Composition" 772). In Expressivist rhetoric, the dialectic between the student writer and her classmates is to help her discover "errors" that hinder her from getting to her authentic self. As Berlin states in "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class," the goal of expressionism is that the student can only come to terms with his experience by using "metaphors" and "original figures and tropes" if he wants to know what that experience really means to him. He defines Expressivism:

This original language in turn can be studied by others to understand the self and can even awaken in readers the experience of themselves.

Authentic self-expression can thus lead to authentic self-experience for both the writer and the reader. The most important measure of authenticity, of genuine self-discovery and self-revelation, furthermore, is the presence of originality in expression; and this is the case whether the writer is creating poetry or writing a business report. Discovering the true self in writing will simultaneously enable the individual to discover the truth of the situation which evoked the writing, a situation that, needless to

say, must always be compatible with the development of the self.

(Berlin, "Rhetoric and Ideology" 485)

Although Expressivism is a strategy for discovery, connecting to one's audience through minority languages can also lead to self-discovery and better writing. Lisa Ede calls the writing process a social act, which is distinct from the cognitivists who forward the idea that writing is an individualistic, isolated act and that process (prewriting, writing, revising, editing and method) is necessary to accomplish form (83). Seeing the writing process as a social act assumes not only that collaborative teaching and learning will take place, but also that audience plays a role in helping the writer articulate his or her goals for writing, and one such audience may represent a home discourse. Here the process of developing form takes on a minor position, in the scheme of writing as content takes a more substantial position since the writer must rely on readers to help him discover his personal truth.

Expressivists, then, center themselves in the text as a way to show nonconformity or resistance to "economic, political, and social pressures to conform" (Berlin, "Rhetoric and Ideology" 486). These student writers use their voices, which can be nonstandard to resist status quo capitalistic society's need for standardization, which they view as oppressive. Berlin describes this theoretical position as follows:

For expressionistic rhetoric, the correct response to the imposition of current economic, political, and social arrangements is thus resistance, but a resistance that is always construed in individual terms. Collective retaliation poses as much of a threat to individual integrity as does the collective forces being resisted, and so is itself suspect. The only hope in a society working to destroy the uniqueness of the individual is for each of

us to assert our individuality against the tyranny of the authoritarian corporation, state, and society. Strategies for doing so must of course be left to the individual, each lighting one small candle in order to create a brighter world. (“Rhetoric and Ideology” 487)

The political goal often is not realized in the classroom because teacher and students are often more comfortable defining Expressivism by writing about “what makes you who you are” than rebelling against capitalism. Expressivism is a common student response to standardized proficiency exams, but it often it is not valued highly by test-graders and results in student failure of the test, because it seems as though the writer is asking the audience to help him or her make sense of who he or she is and what he or she stands for. Such prose can be considered the internal writing suitable for journal writing and informal pieces but not suitable for test writing.

The group that most highly values the process or formation of content is The New Rhetoric, which Berlin advocates English teachers utilize and which is also called *social-epistemic rhetoric*. This rhetoric assumes that truth is relative and can only be accepted after it is negotiated between writer and audience through word choice and the presentation of a worldview (reality). In this sense, knowledge is constructed together between writer and reader (Berlin, “Contemporary Composition” 774). Texts produced by Social-Epistemic Rhetoric or the New Rhetoric can be open-ended texts or questioning or challenging texts that directly address ideology that fails to support the writer. The writer who realizes false consciousness ideologies (and there are many of them) where a particular group benefits at his expense, but he can write against such ideologies. The writer may directly call attention to this dominant hegemony in an attempt to make the situation more democratic, and he will use language and the

discourse community to which he belongs to make his argument (Berlin, “Rhetoric and Ideology” 489-91). Ira Shor says Social-Epistemic Rhetoric moves the student out of an object position and into a subject-agent position, with the result that if the student uncovers and dismantles the limiting ideology, benefiting not only himself but other victims in his community as well (Shor qtd. in Berlin, “Rhetoric and Ideology” 491). Ede deems that many scholars define writing process as both Social-Epistemic Rhetoric and post-process because in these classrooms process of form is not the center of classroom discussion, and for some it is not in the classroom at all since what content, that is, what words do to and for people is the focus of these highly politicized, radical classrooms (85). Here the writer challenges her audience to see and actively change the dominance that she feels over a situation or the dominant behavior she perceives from the very audience that reads her. Social-epistemic responses to proficiency tests are rare because students do not want to offend the test-grader. Indeed, some students at Carey have attempted to write this way, and many of their papers have been met with amusement and subsequent failure.

Berlin sums up well the differences among the groups when he places all of them together to highlight their distinctions:

Classical Rhetoric considers truth to be located in the rational operation of the mind. Positivist Rhetoric in the correct perception of sense impressions, and Neo-Platonic Rhetoric within the individual, attainable only through an internal apprehension. In each case, knowledge is a commodity situated in a permanent location, a repository to which the individual goes to be enlightened.

For the New Rhetoric, knowledge is not simply a static entity available for retrieval. Truth is dynamic and dialectical, the result of a process involving the interaction of opposing elements.

(“Contemporary Composition” 773-4)

What Berlin is indicating, then, in his two articles is that the process of writing really is not just about how students approach a writing task, although approach is one element. In a larger sense, each process theory is an ideology that describes to students how they should interact with the world around them. Current-traditionalists believe in the “rational operation of the mind” and subsequently in the “correct perception of their descriptions that can only be logically induced or deduced.” Expressivists find that the rational is based on the emotional need to know one’s self better, and the Social Epistemic group believes that the rational is found through the continual construction and dismantling of power. Thus, logic is being defined in different ways. For Current-traditionals it is a way of reasoning that is highly structured and compatible with the way most people think. This logic is based on a shared value system that understands what is right, wrong, and good for the world. Again, this is the pattern most likely to be rewarded on the Standardized English Proficiency Exam. However, Expressivists and Social Epistemics challenge this notion of a common-sense logic by expanding the definition to include individualist forms of logic (Expressivism) and radically constructed forms of logic (Social-Epistemic). And so what Berlin shows by separation of the camps so that we can see what makes each one unique is that not all logics are treated equally in the academic environment. By applying his premise to standardized testing in college composition, we can see that, indeed, not all logics are equally valued on these exams.

Moreover, although some teachers use process theory in a purist sense as Berlin does when he separates the groups, other teachers combine all four perspectives in their teaching, meaning the student will have to divine which side to be on when taking a high-stakes proficiency English exam. In *Situating Composition: Composition Studies and the Politics of Location*, Ede discusses how she combines all four perspectives due to her evolution in her theoretical perspective on process over the years.

Ede thinks that positioning these theories as separate and distinct can be problematic. She chooses to label the camps that Berlin speaks of solely as process. She states that there are three camps: “writing process,” “writing as social process,” and “post-process theory” (83). These camps can be equated with Berlin’s groupings. However, she tries to show what happens when the process distinctions are blurred when she analyzes the work she has done for her own composition classrooms. Ede finds that the focus on process and not product was a big shift in the field of composition studies in the 1970s and early 1980s. However, the writing process movement was criticized for not focusing on the social aspects of writing, and writing process’ adherence to “algorithms, heuristics, and guidelines for composing” was also criticized as representing current-traditional practices. Thus, the second camp in Ede’s argument is the writing as social process proponents who claimed that writing could not be studied and learned just as a recursive act, but that “collaborative learning and writing” was the work of writers (84). This camp is analogous to Expressivist Rhetoric. Post-Process is the belief that writing process is secondary to “a range of literate activities that challenge sociohistorical subjects caught in a flawed social order to enact a democratic rhetoric,” according to John Clifford and Elizabeth Ervin in “The Ethics of Process,” and a rejection of the “formulaic framework for understanding writing that process

suggested,’’ according to Joseph Petraglia (qtd. in Ede 85). Thus, post-process falls under the paradigm of Social-Epistemic Rhetoric.

Ede then tries to show how her course descriptions over the years blur these categories. For the first eleven years at Oregon State University, Ede wrote the same course description for her English Composition class (WR 121) as for her advanced composition class (WR 416). Her description reads:

This course will focus upon the fundamentals of expository prose. Although we will spend some class time reviewing basic language skills, the main emphasis will be on the more complex art of essay writing. Student will write weekly essays and will be encouraged to revise frequently. Paper topics will be based upon students’ own interest and experiences. (Ede 89)

Her analysis of her description is mainly that it is both current-traditional and writing as process based:

The use of the terms “fundamentals,” “basic,” and “expository” clearly suggest traditional assumptions about composition: these terms evoke a course concerned with written propriety and with a fairly limited range of genres. But these references exist in tension with the ‘more complex art of essay writing.’ And of course, elements of process are there as well—both in the emphasis on revision and on students’ writing on topics of their own choice. (Ede 89)

From 1982-1987 she writes another description for both classes that she describes as process-oriented when she says, “This course is designed to help students become more effective, efficient and flexible writers. Students will write 5 themes” (Ede 90).

This description is also indicative of cognitivist rhetoric, and its focus on the managerial style of writing. Several years later, she refers to both classes as writing workshop classrooms where group work will be instituted because—she says—she was influenced by the social view of writing under the writing as social act theory and social-epistemic theory.

In fall 1994, Ede makes another shift to a more in depth form of social epistemic rhetorical classroom:

In this course, we'll investigate what it means to write—to be a writer—while also engaging in various activities designed to help students become more effective, efficient, and confident writers. Students will complete a variety of informal and formal writing assignments and participate in regular collaborative learning activities. (Ede 92)

Her shift here is the inclusion of 'to be a writer,' which "represents [her] effort...to suggest that writing is not simply a skill to be learned but also involves subjectivity and agency" (93). Then from 1995 to the present time in Ede's Advanced Composition class, process is totally situated in the background of her teaching; method is no longer the focus of her teaching, as it was when she first came to OSU, but social-epistemic rhetoric is her central goal so that now she has taken on post-process ideology:

What does it mean to be a writer? What is the relationship between the language(s) we speak and write in our home communities and the writing we do at school or on the job? How do writers learn to function in diverse (and sometimes conflicting) communities? What does it mean to have authority as a writer—to be considered literate in a particular community—and how do writers gain (and maintain) such authority?

What role do textual conventions, and the assumptions underlying them, play in this process? What options do writers have if they wish to resist these conventions?

In this class we will discuss questions such as these as we work together to become more effective, self-confident, and self-conscious writers. As the case with most composition classes, we will function as a writing workshop—talking about the writing process, working collaboratively on work in progress. But we will also inquire together about what is at stake when we write. Drawing upon literacy narratives composed by both professional and student writers, we will explore the tensions (and satisfaction) that inevitably result when we wish to express our ideas, to claim a space for ourselves, in and with communities that may or may not share our assumptions and conventions.

Students will complete a variety of informal and formal writing assignments and participate in frequent collaborative learning activities (93).

Moreover, Ede now discusses the ‘tools of the trade’ in a traditional sense by having “activities that encourage attention to traditional craft issues” but she also discusses the “politics of style”:

Such politics are, after all, a major site where issues of power and authority in writing are played out. In recent advanced composition classes, some students have chosen to resist the conventions of academic prose—to write personal essays or to experiment with alternative discourses, such as multivoiced writing

or writing that experiments with elements of visual as well as textual form. In this sense, greater attention to power and authority in my writing class has brought both increased attention to ideological critique and to elements of play and pleasure in writing—elements that are associated by some with expressivism.

My interest in issues of power and authority has also caused me to rethink my approach to error, and to do so in multiple ways. As a result of this rethinking, for instance, I find myself regularly talking with students about the social nature of error. ‘Why,’ I regularly ask students in composition classes, ‘does Joan Didion get to have comma splices in her writing, but you don’t?’ ‘Why are some forms of dialect acceptable in published prose, and others not acceptable?’ (Questions like these can lead to fruitful discussions of such related issues as the relative flexibility or rigidity of genres in business, industry, and the professions.) I also give students the option of using nonstandard English in their essays—though they need to be prepared to show that this use is intentional and that it is appropriate given their rhetorical situation.

(101)

Ede traces the history of her course descriptions to show that although taxonomies may be used to see how each theory works, scholars should read against the grain of taxonomies because it has a restrictive quality. For a scholar to make a commitment to one camp means that he or she is out of the other camps. Thus, allegiance to one seems to prevent scholars from making any claim on the others. Likewise, if English

Proficiency Exams are steeped in one camp, the rhetoric of the test allows little room for alternative readings whereby teachers or students could read and write outside of the current-traditional paradigm that the test usually presents. And yet, Ede shows by her very teaching practice that students often work with two or all three camps at one time in her classes. These same students may also approach a proficiency exam using all three approaches to writing, but they may be unaware of the fact that the very process-product dichotomy that the test exemplifies manifested in the field of Composition Studies refuses them the option of being read by teachers in more ways that are liberal. Teachers may want to read the test differently, but they would be hard-pressed to do so under the strict guidelines of the test rubric, which emphasizes Classicists and Current-traditional theories.

An example of how a purist reliance on Classicists or Current-traditional theories places the student test-taker trained in other theories outside the parameters of good writing is the student trained in the New Rhetoric. The student in the example below is venting his frustration, of course, but under Berlin's category we can also view his work as a direct address to his audience of test readers who hold the power to pass or fail him. The test question is: As a student at WCU, you may have encountered situations or procedures which you think could be improved. Identify a specific problem including the way students are affected and offer a solution, being careful to explain how the change addresses the problem identified. This student's answer represents the text that disrupts the idea that such essays are approached objectively and formally.

Here is the student's answer:

“A Change Must Happen”

As a transfer student from Jones County Junior College, one has

already sufficiently taken English 101 and 102. The thought of taking a writing essay is completely bogus. because of the fact that it is completely a retarded thing to do. I guess because I'm writing crap or this crappy way to do somebody that's transferring you could go ahead and make them take it just to make a little more extra cash. That's a bunch of crap and I'm sticking to it. And the fact that you have 100 people in a room with no AC is a crying shame. (Sample student essay #6)

The student wrote directly to his audience, the test readers, and we all had mixed reactions. Some said he should fail because his anger makes him incoherent. Others said that they liked the direct address and had he finished the essay he might have passed. All the readers (since this essay was so different everyone in the grading room read it) agreed that his not finishing the essay caused him to fail. What is interesting here is that the student directly challenged authority because he saw no purpose in completing the rhetorical task, and in essence, he is asking the readers for the purpose of doing such an essay. Instead of us explaining aloud what is being asked of us, which is a definition of purpose and our expectations in English with him or among ourselves even at that particular moment, we instead did not construct knowledge with him. We also did not question our power to create and administer a test that may, in fact, counter the approval of his writing represented by passing grades in English 101 and 102 from the community college. His voice was indeed silenced, and yet, unaware, he was indeed performing the strategies of social-epistemic rhetoric (Ede's definition) by using writing to alternate his reality by placing himself and us in a more equitable relationship.

When students sit for the William Carey English Proficiency Exam, the first page they see is the grading rubric, which tells them that they are "required to write a well-

organized and well-developed essay” (William Carey English Proficiency Exam Application in appendix). The highest score is a 6 and the lowest is a 1. A score of 6 in the Carey rubric demands, under the section Proficient Content is Organization and Development, that “uses appropriate details to support a thesis or illustrate ideas,” and which “shows unity, coherence, and progression” (William Carey English Proficiency Exam Application in appendix). The emphasis on writing a well-organized and well-developed essay indicates that the current-traditional, managerial style of writing is expected. There is no mention of strong voice or substantial, complex subject matter encompassing no easy answers or incomplete closure. The criteria for a score of six also say that the student must show “syntactic variety” and “clear facility in the use of language” (William Carey English Proficiency Exam Application). Any rubric criterion that is not entirely fulfilled results in a lower score for example in a 5 “The essay clearly demonstrates proficiency in writing, though it may have minor errors” to a 4 “The essay demonstrates proficiency in writing, though it may have occasional errors” (William Carey English Proficiency Exam Application). The student can pass the exam with a grade 4, 5, 6. However the 3, described as “the essay may demonstrate some proficiency in writing, but it is clearly flawed,” is the telling grade, because here is where one can see which ideologies are valued by composition teachers. The rubric for a 3 specifies such deficiencies as “inadequate organization and development,” “fails to support a thesis or illustrate generalizations with appropriate detail,” “uses limited and inappropriate word choice, sentence style, and structure,” and “has a pattern or accumulation of errors in mechanics, usage, or sentence structure (six or more errors).” But I ask whether the “inadequate,” “generalized,” “inappropriate word choice,” and “pattern of errors” might have anything to do with the valuing of one process ideology over all the other ideologies

that inform both scholarly research and pedagogy. Could a bias exist against expressive and social-epistemic rhetorics when test responses are generalized by readers as just not “good writing”? I would argue that the general acceptance that these ideologies do exist in our classrooms whether consciously or unconsciously acknowledged by members of the English department do carry over to the testing situation. In many cases, the managerial style of writing becomes the acceptable style of writing for the easiest analysis of the 6 or more grammar errors without a careful and critical consideration of what the writer is actually trying to perform. Thus, a grammar only analysis may quickly overshadow a true assessment, with the result that the ideology that the student learned and mastered in the composition classroom and is using on the test may nevertheless be devalued or misunderstood by graders as careless writing.

By looking at an exam that follows all the criteria requirements of 4, 5, or 6 (her grade number is not listed on the P for pass), we can see how a student practices writing as process or current-traditionalism.

Her question is: “Tell about an event that has caused you great guilt and how you have dealt with that guilt.”

Lost Friend

A friend is someone you can count on no matter what. It is a bond that should never be broken by another person. I never really understood how precious friendship could be until my actions ended it all.

(Sample student essay #7)

Look at how well this student follows the conventions of formal writing. The first sentence is clearly the thesis. The second sentence describes the first in that a good friend that is counted on specifically never breaks a bond, which is what makes the

person a good friend. The last sentence sets up the action and captures the reader's attention. The paragraph has the obligatory three sentences, which makes it a paragraph. Except for the vague "It" that begins sentence two, there are no grammatical errors. This paper passes because this student knows the rules of writing. There is no emotional, social, or rhetorical (need to persuade) attachment to the subject, and so her audience does not have to invest a similar effort in reading it.

The Multiple Ways of Composing and The Discipline-Specific Composing Dichotomy

Of the three departments that I visited along with the Chair of the English department and at times the primary director and creator of the EPE used before termination, two of them indicated multiple ways of writing. Members of the Business Department said that they want very practical English that emphasizes the concepts that they teach. They described Business English whereby the student must show that he can use the specialized discourse of the Business discipline and can problem-solve. These goals meet the goals of the Business world. However, when asked what type of English they perceive the EPE as representing, one Business instructor said that he tells all of his students that when they go to take the EPE they had better "dot all of their I's and cross all of their T's" (William Carey Business Faculty Meeting, 2010). He went on to tell students that what goes on in the English department is entirely different from what they do over there (William Carey Business Faculty Meeting, 2010). Thus, their conversations about the differences in writing indicate that they know and are telling students there is more than one way to write in order to convey meaning.

What is quite complicated is how the Business Department conceives of and utilizes this distinction between what they consider to be the nature of both academic Englishes. The following conversation is about the implementation of a Writing Center on campus in

order to replace the EPE and address the writing needs of all students across campus whether they are asked to write a discipline-specific paper for Business or a genre-oriented paper for English:

Roberts: Well, we really don't understand why the EPE was terminated.

We thought the test was in place to help students see where they fall short in their writing.

Laurel: We already know over here, which students can and cannot write, and there are a lot of them. We have things in place over here that we do to bring them up to a level where they are understood. We point it out to them on their papers, call them in for one-on-one conferences, and we have them get outstanding student business majors to tutor them.

Richardson: Well, one reason we terminated the test is because we thought it sent the message that there is only one way to write for the test when actually students practice several ways of writing.

Brookter: Yes, for example, we have not seen a test yet where students have written a discipline-specific answer. We have questions on the test that would allow them to write a discipline-specific paper such as a business paper, but they would not do it. If they had written in their area of expertise, what they do in their majors, they might not have failed the EPE.

Roberts: Um. Well, we know the test confirmed to us which students could and could not write.

Brookter: In place of the test, we are considering a Writing Center where we discuss discipline-specific texts with students as well as how to write

on general subjects for the English Department. (William Carey Business Faculty Meeting, 2010)

At this point, everyone starts talking at once, even the Chair of English and Tate, the former director of the EPE, and everyone is trying to qualify how such a Writing Center can replace a test:

Brookter: This Center will talk about what is good writing, how language works to convey a point depending upon your purpose for writing, grammar rules, and just help them with their papers for any department.

Tate: Well, the Center will try to help English students write English papers. I don't think we are going to be able to discuss what other majors do.

Roberts: Yes, we don't need that because we already do that over here.

We don't see the need in that. (William Carey Business Faculty Meeting, 2010)

What is emerging from this conversation is a need to compartmentalize English into two separate components. The English Department and the Business Department define good English in distinctive ways, and these ways are not to be merged based on the purpose of the writer. This compartmentalization is yet another message that is conveyed to students and plays out to their disadvantage on the exam.

The test has such strict guidelines that cause students to focus on form more than content to such a degree that Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) principles play no part in the testing situation. None of the students that I have read while grading the EPEs used the terminology in their fields to answer test questions. Thus, the business students did not talk about marketability, profit-margins, commodities, commercialism or any

business terms to show they are knowledgeable in their fields. The psychology majors could have discussed introverts and extroverts or personality types and behaviorisms in their fields, and so on for all other specialized disciplines. This bringing of disciplines into the English department, which is one key principle of WAC—the focus on the whole person and learning in a holistic sense—would have helped them to generate text, capture the reader’s attention, and be highly rated for appearing as authoritative. Just about every question on the EPEs can be tailored by the student to discuss his or her major. For instance, “Write an essay describing what college students can do to improve one of the following: A. “Your neighborhood.” Here students do not talk about “blight,” “housing shortages,” “gentrification,” which would reference discussions that they had in classes in their majors. They may not have heard the topics discussed on the news or read about them in print media, but what they hear in their specialized classes and in their own households about people having to move out, or people they do not want moving in could work as strong points of reference for them on the exam. However, students do not want to complicate issues by pondering complex ideas and stereotypes on a standardized test read by strangers, and so they play it safe by talking about the litter in their neighborhoods or how the elderly need supervision.

Another test question could be tailored to the advantage of those in the health care field:

“As a number of elderly Americans increases, the number and variety of jobs in fields related to the care of the elderly also increases. WCU offers courses in gerontology which attract a large number of students. Write an essay discussing the challenges or rewards of working with the elderly, or advocate a new program to benefit the elderly, or perhaps you want to write about how you plan to minimize or avoid some of the problems

faced by the elderly.” (Health care prompt)

One way to approach this question, based on what the teacher who wrote this question had in mind, is that students who had taken gerontology classes or work already with the elderly and were quite aware of the restrictions of public assistance or nursing home abuses of the elderly could answer this question. Instead, many students wrote stories about how they take the elderly places and how they care for their grandparents. Any mention of governmental entities, policies, and plans such as Medicaid, Medicare, Elder Law, Elder Abuse, End of Life issues were missing. Another prime example of an actual Carey test question is:

Some of the most pressing social issues in American life today are further complicated by imprecise definitions of critical terms. Various medical cases, for example, have brought worldwide attention to the legal and medical definitions of the word death. Select one of the following words, and write an essay in which you discuss not only the definition of the term but also the problems associated with defining it: Morality, Academic Integrity, Pornography, Censorship, Insanity, Happiness, Equality.

(Definition prompt)

What is important to note here is that students can easily use circular reasoning for any of these complex topics, since in essence for any one they pick they will in some way keep saying what is good or bad about these concepts. However, if they were to bring in what they have learned in their majors, they may have a chance at making a justifiable argument about the terms. What would happen if the psychology major analyzed “Happiness” in the context of extroverts and introverts? What would happen if the sociology major talked about morality and the criminal mind? The logical opposing

argument here is that freshman, sophomores and juniors even have not gotten into their majors or far enough into their majors to make these masterful leaps in English.

However, we have to assume that on some level students are familiar with these concepts because for one, they are addressed on the test, and two, whether we approve or not, students watch *C.S.I.*, *Oprah* and other shows that typically respond to these issues.

What we get from the students are how happy they are or how they learned to be good, and they often fail for being repetitive, too brief, not descriptive enough, or ungrammatical.

Many teachers in the department have indicated that they do not know of any EPE in which the student has used specialized terminology. A review of the entire 2008 year of EPEs at William Carey, or 145 tests, reveals that not one student test-taker consistently and directly used discipline-specific terminology to answer the test prompts. The complete separation of other departments from the English composition experience is just the type of problem that Writing Across the Curriculum proponents are trying to combat. In *Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum*, second edition, Laurence Behrens and Leonard Rosen quickly inform instructors that the purpose of their book is to “bridge the gap between writing and other disciplines” (vii). Their work and other readers like it present one general topic and show how different fields using their own terminology and format address these issues: “[Students] read how a psychologist, a legal scholar, and a philosopher approach the issue of obedience to authority, and how these specialists present their characteristic assumptions and observations about the subject” (vii). These various readings on the same topic are not just for students to read, but to try their hand at writing based on which field they are in or if they have a general interest in writing in a field that is not their own. In terms of the exam, indeed, what is important to note is that

students read the test and gather from their perceptions of the test that generalizations and formalism is the rule for passing, and so they practice compartmentalization, the segmentation of their fields from test writing, and rightly so. They assume that the test requires narrative or explanatory papers which require topic sentences and at least three examples. They do not assume that the test requires specialized discourse and in-depth treatment of the subject. Some students can present generic texts that have excellent grammar and sentence structure and they pass, some students take the topics and tell such good stories that they pass. But some students lack skills in grammar and have trouble knowing how to sound dramatic in the right places. For these students, discipline-specific writing could have been an option that could have given them a chance, but the test rhetoric and the ways we present the test to them limit this choice.

Brian Huot states that proficiency exams and other Standardized exams in English appear to be objective, but many scholars consider an objective test to be by its very nature a subjective and potentially harmful enterprise. He posits that although the efforts to make essay based tests objective in today's college environments dates back to the entrance exams of Harvard in the 1920s, such tests are also aligned with the work of College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB) and the Educational Testing Service (ETS). The need to be able to consistently measure the same components in every test meets the requirement of reliability in psychometrics and classical test theory. Moreover, the institutional need is to measure that which is most important for understanding the student's progress in English and whether or not English classes are performing at peak levels; the test must be valid. Therefore, "student ability in writing, as in anything else, is a fixed, consistent, and acontextual human trait" that can be measured consistently (Huot 83). The problem with this requirement is, as Huot states, that many in composition do

not think writing is “context free” like the hard sciences (82-83). Students, scholars argue, write from a historical moment and from a rhetorical context based on environments they are affiliated with that indicate that not all tests will closely require the same writerly traits.¹⁴ However, these tests overlook context in an effort to be fair. If a test rubric assesses for common traits in English such as grammar and mechanics, sentence structure and form (Does this paper have a thesis?), then a student does not have to worry about being judged on where he is from and if his story or explanations are accurate. However, is teacher expectation of surface-level writing on proficiency exams really fair? And is such writing really an accurate picture of the critiques we give in the classroom? If we ask students on their papers to tell us what they mean, are we not asking them to explain better the context from which they write? Huot explains that objective, standardized essay exams have no room for writing, for meaning, insight, investigation, or purpose. Rather, they are about writing well, since “conventional writing assessment’s emphasis on uniformity and test-type conditions are a product of a testing theory that assumes that individual matters of context and rhetoric are factors to be overcome. From this perspective, a ‘true’ measure of student ability can only be achieved through technical and statistical rigor” (85).

Huot gives as an example a writing assessment given to 127,756 eighth-grade students that was “theoretically acceptable” under the paradigm of classical test theory mandate for reliability and validity. The assessment was deemed reliable because the researchers George Englehard Jr., Belita Gordon and Stephen Gabrielson looked for certain definite components in each test: “the effects of discourse mode, experiential

¹⁴ Composition is quite subjective, which is why scholars find classical test theory inept, and call for a new theory to evaluate student writing. See Davida Charney and Bob Broad.

demand, and gender on writing quality” (88). However, Huot says, their “criteria for assessing student writing” is suspect (88). What Huot found is very similar to how the Carey test is written:

Three out of the five domains used for scoring all of this writing are “sentence formation,” “usage,” and “mechanics.” The other two domains also emphasize the conventions of writing. “Content and organization” are relegated to one domain, with “clearly established controlling idea,” “clearly discernible order of presentation” and “logical transitions and flow of ideas” as three of the six items in the domain. It is pretty easy to see how applicable these items are to the form of the standard five-paragraph essay. Domain number two, which is labeled “style,” also focuses on the forms of writing. Although two of the items list “concrete images and descriptive language, [and] appropriate tone for topic, audience, and purpose,” the other two are “easily readable [and] varied sentence patterns.” While the study reports the results domain by domain, there is no attempt to differentiate the value of scores for content and organization over those for mechanics (1992, 320). What this research really reports is how the conventions and mechanics of student writing relate to the categories of analyses. This study might more easily and cheaply find out similar things about students by administering tests of grammar and mechanics with a question or two thrown in on thesis statements, topic sentences and transitions. However, the use of an essay test carries with it the weight or illusion of a higher degree of validity. (Huot 88-89)

Not only does the match-up between the rubric and the type of writing (the five

paragraph essay would be an effective choice) convey to the student that mechanics have the greatest weight, but clearly the test instrument itself with the directions and test prompt questions must also convey the same idea if the test is thought to be reliable. I would go a bit farther than Huot when he says the content and mechanics are of equal weight, which means the students would not be able to prioritize content over form since the rubric does not do so. I would add that the content is even addressed in mechanical ways without reference to student voice, agency, and context so that even if the weights were assigned and greater weight were placed on content without an adjustment of the wording as to how content could be seen in a liberal sense, students would still assume formality was the expectation that they had to meet.

Out of all three departments that the faculty in the English Department met with, the Education Department was closest in pedagogy to the Current-traditional practices the English Department uses and is attempting to reform. The Education faculty said they want students to be able to write a sentence especially since their students will be teachers after graduation and they must be able to teach how to write a sentence. They also indicated that all of their classes have writing components. When asked what kinds of writing goes on the Education Department, the responses were very similar:

Catlin: We want students to write formal English.

Matters: Formal English is...it is correct grammar and making sense.

Rawls: We want them to be able to do research and represent their sources correctly.

Catlin: We have a big problem with plagiarism. How do you all handle plagiarism? (William Carey Education Faculty Meeting, 2010)

What was left out of this exchange is any mention of tone, voice, and home literacy.

They all agreed that they thought the English Proficiency Exam was good at detecting sentence level issues and logic errors, which are the same things they look for in their classes.

However, what is really telling about this current-traditional line of reasoning is that it so dominates the mindset of users that when a competing ideological discourse or alternative theoretical perspective (the dichotomy) raises its head, it is overlooked by faculty, and in fact, seen as normal and valid. One Education faculty member could not meet for the group session, but he wanted to be a part of this work so we agreed to meet outside of the group and he agreed to bring some actual student writing from one of his classes. He said that he also evaluated student grammar and their ability to prove their points with evidence. While he stated this, he let me review a student's end-of-the-term portfolio.

He said the student had compiled this portfolio all term long based on her observations as a student teacher. He explained, "As you can see her work is very organized, very well structured. She got an A." (William Carey Education Faculty Member, 2010).

However, when I pointed out the remarkable drawings in the margins and stickers on her portfolio alongside written text, which is a visual literacy and a mixing of discourse with written discourse, his response was "Oh, that is acceptable because teachers use pictures." Indeed, even with the visual literacy, this student is perceived as following the acceptable dictates of her field and not as one who is using an alternative discourse to express herself. Bryant, the faculty member, went on to say that the EPE seemed to do what it was supposed to do, which is very similar to the type of writing done in the Education Department.

The proficiency exam, therefore, limits how academic discourse is being defined at Carey and other institutions across grade levels. Even more noticeable is that it is often the last

word students receive on what English is and what it can do, since many students take these exams after their last English class or right before they graduate. Huot, citing test theorist Peter Johnston, carefully explains the negative implications and situation the student test taker has to deal with after taking an objective-based exam. First, they are, as stated above, asked to write essays that must “exist outside of the context and history in which they are produced,” and they do not move “beyond the ability to regurgitate information” (92). They cannot make meaning with the reader, for no “personal commitment” or “personal relationship with the subject” is required, and lastly, if the test is to be objective in order to be both reliable and valid, then the student writer does not have to show the abilities of “creativity, reflection, and critical thinking” (92). Huot says that we as teachers know surface-level writing is not what we teach student writers in our classroom or how we want them to perform on tests, but this writing is the case existing outside of what we may want if the rhetoric of testing and its theoretical premise of reliability and validity are not redefined. Huot states that:

While those of us who teach writing have always known that we could only pretend to assess writing from an ‘objective’ stance and therefore deferred to testing specialists for an objective view, Johnston contends that, ‘The search for objectivity may not simply be futile. I believe it to be destructive’ (1989, 511). Drawing upon the work of Jerome Bruner, Johnston explains that if education is to create a change in individuals beyond the ability to regurgitate information, its focus cannot be ‘objective,’ because abilities like creativity, reflection, and critical thinking require a personal relationship with the subject....The importance of reflection or point of view in writing is contradictory to an objective approach, because to assume a particular position is to be subjective. (Huot 92, quoting

Johnston 511)

The Art Department said on the survey that they do a lot of writing in their classrooms and that they would really want to be a part of a discussion on the definition of academic English and the role of the EPE. Because their primary focus is on Art, the English faculty was curious as to how writing factors into their classroom in more than a cursory manner. The Art Department consists of the Chair and the Director, and the rest of the department faculty is adjuncts, so only these two were at the meeting with Dr. Richardson, the Chair of English and me. They quickly explained what type of writing that they do:

May: We believe in inclusive writing. Students must be able to express themselves—sometimes before they draw we have them write on their feelings and their reflections, and sometimes we do this after they draw in order for them to interpret their pieces in writing.

Adams: They write all the time from research on famous artists to how they are growing as an artist. We really want to hear what they think in their words.

Brookter: Does this mean that they get to use their own discourses even if it isn't Standardized English?

May: Yes. Students are multicultural so their writing should reflect who they are.

Adams: Yes.

May: Students must write this way when preparing their art portfolio because it is the only way they can distinguish themselves and their art

from other artists. This is what will sell them in shows and houses.

Adams: They have to be unique if they want recognition in the art world...it is very competitive in art. (William Carey Art Faculty Meeting, 2010)

Both May and Adams said they understood the purpose of the EPE and that they had no problems with the test. However, they also said that “there are other ways to write” (William Carey Art Faculty Meeting, 2010). Their perspective on writing can be seen as specific to their discipline. The world of art is creative and often edgy. Dr. Richardson indicated that their “writing is indicative of their field” (William Carey Art Faculty Meeting, 2010). However, what is important to note for the purpose of this study is that the art student who sat for the EPE may have had a highly social epistemic way of writing that clearly could not be valued on the exam. There has to be a conscious level of suppression going on for them to write the exam in very formal ways, the very ways that would be questioned in the Art Department. Should this type of pressure exist for a student who takes a written test assessment? The three departmental meetings seem to indicate that students are, in fact, forced to choose between what they know about writing and what the written assessment wants them know about writing.

Clearly, although Carey could not articulate what was wrong with the EPE and moved to terminate it, on some level they were reacting to the objective nature of the test and the testing situation. They would be hard-pressed to tell students to be reflective, creative, and expressive on a test that expects objectivity. However, newer movements in test theory, according to Huot, shows that scholars and teachers are expanding Academic Discourse by personalizing it with the understanding that text readers are to come to the table with the ability to do “variable textual interpretations on the tests (82). These

interpretations include more reader engagement with student test texts and an awareness of the Expressivists and Social-Epistemic rhetorics that could exist on these tests. Such an awareness, of course, would mean a re-prioritizing in values from a primary value placed on grammar and mechanics to a higher evaluation of context. If we were to reinstate the test in these more inclusive ways, we could give the test early enough to still work with students after the test since exit exams are far too late to engage them in language instruction. Hypothetically, such exams would then permit us to focus on and credit students who masterfully convey what they want to say without a strong predilection toward grammar and mechanics before we place them in basic writing. They should have the opportunity to take the same risks on proficiency tests as they do in the classroom where composition teachers insist that form is only there to help support content, and where teachers challenge those students who believe the well-written sentence that says nothing will earn them the grade.

CHAPTER V

BROADENING THE SCOPE OF ACCEPTABLE ACADEMIC DISCOURSE FOR
WRITTEN ASSESSMENTS ON CAMPUSES

Nowhere is the definition of academic discourse called into question more than when a student must write for an English Proficiency Exam. Competency exams in English are the epitome of a dominant discourse that eradicates all other discourses in its path. If this test is evaluating for how well a student has mastered Standard English, then the grading of grammar and mechanics are key. White says that if all that is needed is a pass/fail evaluation, which I interpret to mean how well a student understands and uses Standard English, then White is correct that such a test calls for “an essay test based on sentence and paragraph construction” (White, *Assigning* 101). However, if the test is trying to assess how well a student thinks on paper then a holistic written assessment is called for (White, “Holisticism” 28). But what is often not considered by teachers is that when the student is asked to perform the tasks of arguing, persuading, and using reason, her style or rhetorical choices may be outside the confines of Standard English conventions. She may define her rhetorical test situation in alternative discourse terms, yet test assessors are reading and grading based on an Academic English discourse ideology that is local to the institution but still broad enough to fit a Eurocentric, minimal standard accepted at many academic institutions. This ideology is current-traditional in the way that it encourages and reinforces a managerial style of writing. However, there are several ways that single test assessment can be rewarding for both teachers and students who are both accustomed to post-process classrooms, i.e., those classrooms that allow for the interrogation of institutionalization.

First, teachers should tell students exactly what a competency exam entails. Very productive discussions could happen that covers the rhetorical situation presented by current-traditional style exams. Students need to know that they are writing in a particular genre to a particular audience that requires a particular response. We could explain that the test is general and that basic level writing skills are necessary. We could also counsel the students to stick to the point by answering the question directly, to use the five-paragraph essay format, to use simple language, and to use simple sentences to avoid grammatical mistakes. Discussions about this one type of writing could show students that there are different ways to write depending on the situation the writer confronts. Both teachers and students may believe that this type of writing sounds mechanical, formulaic, and even reductive, and they may be correct, but it is the type of writing often favored by test readers who need to see a clean text with minor errors, but with a clear line of reasoning supported by concise examples. We can contrast this type of writing to the more expressive types we do in class. In this way, such competency exams would be normalized as just one genre of writing among many, one that has a particular audience and a particular, conservative purpose. As one teacher at William Carey stressed, “test writing is a protocol and students need to write to the protocol” (William Carey English Faculty Focus Group Meeting, 2011). Here academic English is defined as objective, distant prose.

However, an essay exam that allows for post-process pedagogies would require maximum competency skills. Specifically, a post-process exam asks that students present a strong voice and control the test question by making it their own. Alternative discourse theory and practice broadens the definition of academic discourse. On a very

basic level, alternative discourse theory is defined as mixing discourses when speaking or writing. It recognizes as normal, for instance, the addition of an ethnic narrative to an argumentative text in order to make a point or the addition of a dialectical poem at the end of an argumentative essay. Alternative discourse is mixed because the writer layers home discourse with school discourse in order to create a critical essay. This mixing of writing strategies should meet with the approval of English departments because students would work diligently with Standard English while trying to perform this rhetorical task. Mixed discourses in English also reinforce the notion to students that the English language offers a masterful way to make use of language mixing.

Alternative discourse theorist Paul Matsuda shows us that scholars mix discourses in order to write and publish so as to normalize the second, more controversial definition for alternative discourse (192).¹⁵ Indeed, alternative discourse theorists postulate that alternative discourse is a mixture of standard academic discourse with divergent English discourses. Moreover, some of these theorists even advocate ethnic discourse in foreign languages mixed with Standard English text here and there so that the writer can claim full ownership over his text.¹⁶ This position is considered radical and controversial by conservative academics who define academic discourse as Standard English Only, so Matsuda attempts to normalize this discourse as non-radical and academic by placing it in the same category as the mixed genre discourse that is found in freshman-level composition textbooks and that is taught and valued in the composition classroom as

¹⁵ Scholars, by writing alternative discourse, are actually as Matsuda states, “as Royster suggests, alternative assumptions about discourses” (92).

¹⁶ For an example of Indian dialect in a scholarly work, see Powell “Listening to Ghosts: An Alternative (Non)argument.”

highly intellectual forms of communicative practices.

Moreover, alternative discourse comprises “[the] kind of nontraditional academic discourse [that] may soon make the debate over ‘students’ rights to their own language’ moot. Students, and their professors, are going ahead and developing new ways of writing in the academy that make use of ‘their own’ languages as well as the still-valuable resources of traditional academic discourse”(Schroeder ix). These kinds of discourse are often called “hybrid,” “mixed,” “alternative,” or “constructed” forms of academic discourse (Schroeder ix). The editors of *Alt Dis* explain that “*alternative* invokes a sort of counter-cultural image that bespeaks the political resistance to hegemonic discourse; *mixed* helps to convey exactly what makes these discourses ‘alternative,’ namely that they exhibit stylistic, cultural, and cognitive elements from different discourse communities” (Schroeder ix). The next two terms that describe alternative discourse are somewhat problematic for scholars due to the connotations:

“*Hybrid*, although criticized by some contributors here for its biologically essentializing implications, is helpful...suggesting that in the new forms of discourse, traditional academic traits blend with traits from discourses not traditionally accepted in the academy to produce new forms with their own organic integrity.” And the term *constructed* emphasizes that these forms are negotiated among teachers and students. (Schroeder ix)

Patricia Bizzell indicates, however, that although students may begin using alternative forms of discourse in their classrooms, teachers work to eradicate each part of that alternative by the time they turn in a finished product (25). Thus, these tests would explain to students that alternative discourse is allowed and encouraged by teachers.

The major criticism leveled at alternative discourse by composition teachers is that it is unintelligible. Texts produced by alternative discourses are so specialized that few teachers or students can read them. Moreover, critics have stated that the discourses do not represent linear or logical thinking. Bizzell asserts in “The Intellectual Work of ‘Mixed’ Forms of Academic Discourse” that for knowledge to be produced in a text, “the persona is extremely precise, exacting, rigorous—if debate is going to generate knowledge, all participants must use language carefully, demonstrate their knowledge of earlier scholarly work, argue logically and fairly, use sound evidence, and so on” (2). The criteria that Bizzell lists as constituting academic writing is one she also finds present in alternative discourse. Thus, she approves of scholars who use alternative discourse when she states that “these new discourses are still academic, in that they are doing the intellectual work of the academy—rigorous, reflective scholarship” although they may use “personal experience as evidence...or [employ] cultural allusions or language variants that do not match the cultural capital of the dominant white male group” (Bizzell “Intellectual Work” 2). This criticism has also caused Jacqueline Jones Royster to claim in “Academic Discourses or Small Boats on a Big Sea” that “the possibility that knowledge and experience is capable of having significant impact, regardless of the source from which it comes,” and she describes a mandate where classroom instruction follows the research and scholarship in our field that says we reconfigure our classrooms to accommodate language diversity (28). Teachers and administrators can understand the need for scholars to write in advanced ways for their audiences, but they are hard-pressed to see this very same need for alternative discourse classroom design and pedagogical methods for the basic writer in foundational

composition classrooms, particularly for the writer who is grappling to construct simple adequate sentences.

One response to alternative discourse has been to position alternative discourse as a companion to the Standard rather than let alternative discourse stand alone as a dominant discourse. Paul Matsuda explains in “Alternative Discourses: A Synthesis” that a student who attempts to practice an alternative discourse in a composition classroom can face consequences (195). First, using “alternative discourses may not be perceived by the teacher as a legitimate impetus for changing her or his expectations about discourses” (195). Teachers and students would only find value in alternative discourses if they have discussions in class about how discourse works and whom it serves, leading them to see that some discourses are more powerful than others in the given rhetorical situation (195). Dorbin says the risk of attempting non-standard forms of writing is greater for students because “students and newcomers to academic discourses are not granted the kind of authority that established scholars have” (qtd. in Matsuda 195). Thus liberal teachers and scholars like Bizzell and Matsuda may have to write, discuss, and have students practice alternative discourses in their classrooms, but they are both aware that their culturally responsive teaching is seen as quirky, radical, weird, left field, dangerous, and in danger of placing their students at a disadvantage in academic spaces, such as their next English class, conference presentations, and writing for campus publications that reward only the Standard. Above all, they know that their students do not have the same academic freedom as professors, and this awareness is confirmed by the expectations promulgated within these other academic spaces. However, in an effort to have multiple languages co-exist in a paper, students at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, Illinois, when I was there during the 1990s were allowed to write

“translation papers” where they first wrote in their own language and then in the same paper translated the dialect into Standard English. My job as a tutor in their Writing Center while working on my MA in Carbondale was to help them to determine what Spanish words or Black English words, for example, needed to have an English translation beside it and what could be left in the nonstandard language because it was self-explanatory. If the paper that these students brought back to show me were any indication, many students received high marks on these papers. If students can use alternative discourse on essays in the classroom successfully, then why is this not accomplished on written English proficiency tests?

Clearly, what is considered college-level writing by some is not college-level writing by others. Although it may be apparent to teachers and students that alternative discourses happen all the time in the academy since writers tend to practice hybridity by mixing genres and strategies in order to make points clearer, what seems to be problematic to teachers are the cultural assumptions behind such discourse. Alternative discourse is often used to expose and dismantle American nationalistic authority, or to do the opposite, which is to defer to authority as many non-native English speakers have been taught to do in writing about their countries’ governments, or to further connect to their home communities using the pathos strategy abundantly, to name just a few. Contrast alternative discourse to what Matsuda calls “male, European American, middle- or upper-class” English or “relatively similar, privileged varieties of English” as carrying “assumptions about language, discourse, and ways of knowing” that they brought with them to the academic situation, creating the “default position” of formal, empirically oriented, and emotionally detached writing, and we can see why teachers are so far removed from exploring and approving of alternative discourses (192). Indeed, the

cultural assumption of alternative discourse is outwardly political, whereas the cultural assumption of standard academic discourse is to forward political agendas but to do so indirectly through the production of substantive knowledge.

When alternative discourse is legitimated in the classroom as academic communication, it informs and expands the curriculum once designed solely for an academic English Only. First, teaching and practicing alternative discourse moves it from being seen as an isolated, alien form of writing, where the writer and discourse is “othered,” to viewing such discourse as mainstream within the cultural and sociohistorical context of the writer’s community (192). Matsuda says the implication of normalizing alternative discourses for teachers and students is that both groups are less likely to see themselves as incoherent or cognitively deficient. He explains further “One of the most common responses to the perceived ‘deficiency’ has been to ‘teach students to conform to the existing norm, as Fox points out, or to fail them as academically unprepared’” (Matsuda 193). Third, not only will allowing alternative discourse practices in the classroom prepare teachers for knowing how to read such texts by knowing what to read for, but such usage will dismantle what Matsuda calls the “static theory of writing,” or the use of Standard English and current-traditional classroom practices to convince students that English is unchanging (193). He counters that English is changing due to “the presence of the new population of students and scholars in academic discourse communities” in such a way that the static view of writing is “becoming increasingly outdated as the makeup of the academic audience is becoming increasingly diverse” (193). He refers to disciplines in the natural and applied sciences dominated by multilingual and multicultural writers who are changing the assumptions as to how discourses can be used and what discourses can achieve. Matsuda then calls on

academics to conceive of writing as “dynamic” and to know that just as diverse populations who enter our doors “need to learn the conventions and assumptions of U.S. academic discourse practices, we too in the academy need to “reassess [our] assumptions about discourse practices in the academy as they come in contact with unfamiliar discourses. That is, the negotiation of assumptions about discourses has to be a bilateral process” (194). Instructors who practice this process are called culturally responsive teachers.

Such culturally responsive teachers create curricula based on alternative discourse practices. According to educator and literacy theorist, Geneva Gay adheres to the definition of culture that Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba have set as “a dynamic system of social values, cognitive codes, behavioral standards, worldviews, and beliefs used to give order and meaning to our own lives as well as the lives of others”(8). Culture, then, is always already present in the classroom. Gay finds that “culture determines how we think, believe, and behave, and these, in turn, affect how we teach and learn” (9). In order to improve school performance in grades K-12, culturally responsive teachers no longer believe in just celebrating cultural diversity as a form of acknowledgement that difference does exist. Instead, they have found ways to more fully integrate diversity into the learning experiences of their students based on two theoretical premises. The first premise is that “discontinuities between the school and low-income students and students of color are an important factor in their low academic achievement” and its second premise “that the academic achievement of these students will increase if schools and teaching are changed so that they reflect and draw on their cultural and language strengths” (Banks ix). Gay goes on to hypothesize that “since how one thinks, writes, and speaks reflects culture and affects performance, aligning instruction to the cultural

communication styles of different ethnic groups can improve school achievement” (xv-xvi). Thus, culturally responsive teaching “centers classroom instruction in multiethnic cultural frames of reference” (Gay xix). For instance, Patricia Enciso in “Reading Discrimination” found that in one fifth grade classroom, Ebonics was relied on as well as the cultural beliefs of the African-Americans in the communities of the two male speakers to make sense of a story that took place during Jim Crow. The teacher used ethnographic principles to study her classroom and found that her students’ perspectives of the story challenged the worldviews of the class and the dominant worldview that she brought to the classroom, providing a more “nuanced” way of seeing and interacting with the text (137).

Enciso used Critical Race Theory to question the routine or normalizing procedures that were going on in the classroom, and she attempted to reconfigure the classroom to become more culturally sensitive. While moving the class from ways of reading traditional conventions, Enciso asked students to read based on the knowledge they brought from home. When she first went into the classroom, many of the fifth graders were discriminated against in their reading practices and in their positions in the classroom. She tried to disrupt the status quo by choosing books on discrimination, and then suspending the discourse constructions on race in order to allow for minority opinions or radical ways of thinking (155). When students were allowed to read for alternate or nuanced positions, she found, they developed voice and were seen as individuals rather than grouped as high class and low class. Enciso posits that both teachers and students who interact within an anti-racist pedagogical classroom will begin to see each other’s potential cannot be defined by static notions of race and class (160-175).

Gay reinforces Enciso's work by comparing the connection between language diversity and school success among minority groups with whites:

Cultural diversity is a strength—a persistent, vitalizing force in our personal and civic lives—although this may not be realized. It is, then, a useful resource for improving educational effectiveness for all students. Just as the evocation of their European American, middle-class heritage contributes to the achievement of White students, using the cultures and experiences of Native Americans, Asian and Pacific Islander Americans, Latino Americans, and African Americans facilitates their school success.

(14)

Moreover, Gloria Ladson-Billings calls on scholars to notice what standardization does to students. She states that our responsibility is two-fold:

We have an obligation to our institutions to push them to confront the 'corporateization' of the university and to work against exclusionary and discriminatory policies. And we have an obligation to our profession to disrupt the canonization and reinscription of curricula and dogma that offer no space for new ideas about the nature and scope of our work. (x)

She insists that she is not just addressing the literacy education community but a broader group, especially those "who are actively engaged in working against racial understanding, even larger groups who sit on the sidelines and ignore or diminish the issue, and a tiny fraction who are making visible racial injustice in education (Ladson-Billings xi).

In "Engaging with Assessment Technologies: Responding to Valuing Diversity as a WPA," Asao Inoue claims that assessment procedures do reveal biases that place the

student writer at a disadvantage. As a WPA and Co-Director of the First Year Writing Program and its assessment coordinator at California State University in Fresno, Inoue asks that teachers analyze how assessments are judgments that are culture-based. He begins by defining assessments:

When I say ‘assess,’ I mean all reading activities, open responses, evaluations that articulate judgments, holistic assessments of work done or not, placement decisions, and grading. Essentially, any time we read and judge, or ask or students to read and judge, which produces articulations of judgments about texts, then we are engaged in processes of articulations of judgments about texts, then we are engaged in processes of assessment, or as I prefer to call them, assessment technologies. (108)

Then he explains how these assessments are based on the culture of the teacher, often to the exclusion of the culture and language assets the students bring to the testing situation:

I theorize writing assessment as technology in order to address issues of racial formations and racism in assessments. I define a writing assessment technology as ‘[a]n historically situated, hegemonic environment in which power is made, used, and, transformed, that consists of sets of artifacts and technical codes, manipulated by institutionally-sanctioned agents, constructed for particular purposes that have relations to abstract ideas and concepts, and whose effects or outcomes shape, and are shaped by, racial, class-based, gender, and other socio-political arrangements’. (108-109)

He finds that these abstract ideas and concepts that are tested for restrict the linguistic diversity that student writers could have used to pass the test. Indeed, he views assessment itself as the structural problem inherent in testing (such as a requirement that

students write at least 500 words or that a certain number of grammatical errors automatically equals failure), rather than individual teacher bias. Since the test is a conceptual issue, Inoue says, we need to reform the concept (109). Clearly, culturally responsive teachers and test theorists find that alternative discourse fits the rubric of a privileged discourse alongside traditional academic discourse and is worthy of a presence in the English composition classroom.

In addition to these considerations, A. Suresh Canagarajah asserts in “The Place of World Englishes in Composition: Pluralization Continued” that alternative discourses are necessary for preparing students for “transnational relationships” (590). He finds that language varieties of English that deviate in significant ways from Standard English such as Indian English, Jamaican English and Sri Lankan English can help students think both critically and creatively in ways that cannot be accomplished with the Standard alone. Citing his use of Tamil and English, his observations of foreign students and African-American students, and an ethnographic study by Eva Lam on a Chinese American student named, Almon, Canagarajah argues that mixing Englishes helps maintain and establish multilingual communities, a strategy of networking that serves “functional purposes” and cognitive skills because all classroom members must negotiate the languages in order to understand others and in order to be understood (591). He claims, “Developments like this show that in order to be functional postmodern global citizens, even students from the dominant community (i.e. Anglo American) now need to be proficient in negotiating a repertoire of World Englishes” (Canagarajah 591). But many scholars in composition studies and education agree that being bilingual or multilingual is an asset. The disagreement lies in where scholars place non-standard English. Those that believe such languages should remain at home (or used in the

context of informal writing situations) practice what Canagarajah and others call “code-switching.” Citing John Baugh, Shirley Brice Heath, and Lisa Delpit as well as compositionist, Peter Elbow, Canagarajah explains that such use of dialect as they advocate “as a means for transitioning to the established code” defeats the purpose of alternate discourse language acquisition (595). Here Canagarajah goes beyond the linguists and educators that find dialect useful as a teaching method for transitioning to Standard English. Canagarajah argues that the dialect can be a stand alone language in classrooms and that readers must become knowledgeable as to what the language means, either through the piece’s own context or through the student’s explanation. Some of the newer textbooks such as the *Norton* are following this very trend by not translating languages and only at rare times footnoting the English version.¹⁷ Most teachers, due to time and cost of training considerations, would not be able to become bilingual in this way, but what Canagarajah does is to offer one view of the possibility of inclusive language classrooms and of intensive writing experiences.

Indeed, it is not surprising that classroom language based on “native” norms is irrelevant to what students regard as more socially significant needs in their everyday lives (592). When Somali students learn hip-hop English and Bengali students learn Jamaican English, these students take control of English and make it work for them. Canagarajah concludes, “Classes based on monolingual pedagogies disable students in contexts of linguistic pluralism” (592). When students negotiate real world strategies for themselves and their community, they are practicing English in a way that fosters, maintains, and improves their personal and business associations. This use of dialect

¹⁷ As stated in Chapter I of this dissertation, Barrientos and Tan in Chapter II do not translate their languages for their audiences in the *Norton*.

confirms what many teachers know:

Valuing students' own languages—in this case, nonprestige varieties of English—helps in the acquisition of other dialects, including the socially valued dominant varieties. As we recognize now the vernacular is an asset in the learning of mainstream languages (see Cummins). Valuing the varieties that matter to students can lessen the inhibitions against dominant codes, reduce the exclusive status of those codes, and enable students to accommodate them in their repertoire of Englishes. (592)

Canagarajah insists that students use vernacular in the classroom in terms of “code meshing,” rather than the stop short method of code switching that other politically liberal academics advocate. Code meshing means that students are permitted to use nonstandard English throughout the writing process, including in the final paper. There is no eradication of, say, Ebonics, during the process from drafting to the final paper. Canagarajah especially criticizes how those who only allow a limited use of dialect in the classroom as misinterpreting the Students' Right to Their Own Language:

[These limiting] approaches for accommodating local varieties in the classroom provide for many teachers the way to practice the CCCC resolution of Students' Right to Their Own Language (SRTOL). The extent of the students' right here seems to be letting them use their English at home and in their local communities, and for informal purposes and low-stakes writing needs in the classroom. But shouldn't SRTOL also mean that students have the right to use their vernacular for formal purposes? It appears that SRTOL is interpreted as a policy of tolerance (i.e. permitting nonvalorized codes to survive in less-prestigious contexts),

not promotion (i.e. making active use of these vernaculars or developing them for serious purposes). (596)

His idea of SRTOL as including the vernacular of the student's choice in the entire writing process is hard for many teachers to accept. In Canagarajah's view, the dominant discourse and its connection to economics and social status as often portrayed by teachers does not supersede the innate need by some students to seek and find their identities through minority languages. In his ethnography of African American and ESOL students, he states, "I have discovered the strategies students covertly adopt to bring their Englishes into formal academic writing in a curriculum that encourages their varieties in everything other than formal/graded assignments" (Canagarajah 597).¹⁸ Trying to appropriate language for one's own interests is no different than the reasons someone would want to use Standard English Only, or appropriate some other discourse to fit the situation the writer is in.

He proposes code meshing instead of code switching as the model to be used in composition classrooms. Code switching "separate[s] the codes and prioritize[s] ME (Metropolitan English) for formal purposes. I consider merging the codes. Code meshing is not new to academic writing (Canagarajah 598). He then historicizes the use of dialect among scholars:

Some African American scholars have already used AAVE in rhetorically compelling ways in academic texts that feature SWE....Note also that some radical scholars have used the term code switching broadly to signify the same practice that I call code meshing here—see Anzaldua (in

¹⁸ Canagarajah's ethnography is in both his article "Safe houses" and his book *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism* chapter 7.

Lunsford) and my use (in *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism*). Various other metaphors have been used to describe this strategy—i.e., appropriation (Canagarajah, *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism*), third spaces (Kramsch and Lam; Belcher), and “talking back” (hooks). Though code meshing was used in classical rhetoric as a high-brow activity (i.e. inserting Greek or Latin without translation into English texts), I am presenting this notion as a popular communicative strategy in multilingual communities and developing it even for cases outside such elite bilingualism.

(Canagarajah 598)

The intentional use of language in this way reveals a writer who has a well-defined audience and purpose in mind. The writer does not wish to alienate the reader who typically identifies with English Only texts, but rather the writer works to draw this reader into an audience of people by introducing the reader to new cultures and their subsequent language codes. Dialect is used to create authenticity in a paper, the very criteria that English teachers ask for, so that a paper does not sound so general that anyone could have written it. Again, during my years as a master’s level student at Southern Illinois University, teachers sent their students with translation papers in hand to the writing center where I worked. Writing tutors and students alike were directed by these teachers to make these papers better not by taking out the foreign phrases or Black English but by finding places in the text where they would fit better. Some nonstandard discourse was so important to the understanding of the text that the writer often chose to translate the discourse immediately after using it. By mixing discourses, many writers tried to honor and respect both cultures by making them co-exist rather than having one dominate. At other times, SIU writers, many of them freshmen, intentionally chose not to

translate their divergent language or languages, and, by doing so, they were “asking” the reader to determine the meaning of these words based on the context of the text. In order to not lose the reader, and consequently, lose the ability to be heard on the points they wanted to share with that reader, they worked hard to negotiate languages so that their discourse was not discounted as irrational.

Canagarajah discusses how hard a student writer who practices alternative discourse has to work to achieve his or her purpose for writing. He states, “My proposal demands more, not less, from minority students. They have to not only master the dominant varieties of English, but also know how to bring in their preferred varieties in rhetorically strategic ways. It is not even sufficient to learn different English varieties and use them in appropriate contexts (as proposed by code switching models); now minority students have to learn to bring them together to serve their interests” (599). In addition, if the student is working harder to write with pluralism in mind, then the reader has to work harder to read from a global standpoint.

What alternative discourse does is political for two reasons. The first, as mentioned above, is that the reader is being asked to move beyond egocentrism and to consider how power is created and shared by multiple cultures simultaneously. Indeed, the belief that the dominant discourse, Standard English, or any discourse that is dominant in a particular community has the most power at the time does not resonate with alternative discourse ideology. Hybrid genre writers try to show that by blending languages at times or letting them alternate sentences or paragraphs is an effort to show that cultures that unite are more powerful than cultures that stand alone. Mixed discourses, then, reveal an ideology based on the notion that different people can

construct meaning together, which can serve the values and interests of large groups of people outside of the writer's personal, primary communities.

Indeed, mixed genre texts decrease the high-brow status often associated with Standard English by teachers and administrators by having it co-exist with other languages. When a teacher cannot say she read a Standard English essay but rather a thought-provoking one, then Standard English Only is no longer the language associated with rationality, with intelligence. Instead, the other languages are now valued as having enough worth to bring a message across to an audience. Since they no longer have inferior status, the minority writer may no longer be considered inferior either.

Canagarajah gives a pointed example of eradicating the notion of linguistic inferiority with his Geneva Smitherman example. Her precision and scholarly evidence earns her a space as valid researcher in the academic community:

Smitherman's 'The Historical Struggle for Language Rights in CCC' is a good example of a minority scholar employing a range of dialects to represent her voice and identity in formal academic writing. Interestingly enough, the article takes stock of the pedagogical advances made since SRTOL. For the most part of the paper, Smitherman uses the established code and the conventions of scholarly publication—i.e. citations, footnotes, and scholarly evidence. The essay is also very balanced in representing the alternate positions to the ones she herself holds on SRTOL. Her writing thus wins academic credibility among readers. The instances of AAVE use are few, but carefully deployed to construct her desired voice for this article. (Canagarajah 603)

Students may not be published like Smitherman, but they are writing to an academic

audience on the college level. However, by their very choice of using vernaculars, students are automatically choosing to make academic audiences aware of race, gender and class issues, subjects that may not have come to the forefront if those students were only permitted to write in the Standard. Thus, these student writers, like Smitherman, have found a way to make race, gender, and class more equal in the eyes of the majority culture without appearing defensive.

Canagarajah's 2006 article was greatly influenced by Bruce Horner and John Trimbur's "English Only and U.S. Composition." Horner and Trimbur claim that separating out languages as dominant and non-dominant, standard and non-standard, native and minority is really a way to label people as a nationals or immigrants. English Only, therefore, is a political term that diminishes the linguistic abilities of the non-native speaker. Once inside the academic institution, the immigrant is relabeled as ESL speaker, bilingual student, or part of some other linguistic minority, and these labels carry with them certain "learners' backgrounds and skills" while overlooking the fact that these students could be born in the U.S. have a multilingual mindset (qtd. in Horner and Trimbur 611; see Harklau, Losey, and Siegal "Generation 1.5"). Such labels not only avoid the notion that a multilingual student may believe that he or she equally belongs in two or more cultures and is comfortable and proficient in them, but this rejection of their identity also fosters the notion that all people in the United States should practice unidirectional, monocultural English (Horner and Trimbur 612). Bartholomae likens these actions as similar to what goes on in the ways instructors perceive the writing in basic writing classroom. He says that teachers first look at the written product students turn in and then they label the class *basic writing*, a label that places the student as not in the "norm" or "right." In other words, many instructors do not begin a class by defining

what basic writing is and teaching to the entire group on the same level. Instead these instructors take the work that is given to them and begin to sort students into categories based on an idealized standard. In the same way that a “basic writer” is measured by Standards found in college-level writing many immigrant student writers are also labeled negatively based on Standard English discourse as the standard of measure.

Horner and Trimbur try to shatter the myth that there is a pinnacle that can be reached by following the standard; they show that maybe there is actually more to gain by being multilingual. As Guadalupe Valdes says, “there is no clear point at which someone can be said to have achieved literacy” (qtd. in Horner and Trimbur 612). What is language competence in one community may not be so in another community. Thus, success in English speaking and writing in one community may not be valued in another, and this same logic applies to other non-standard languages. Moreover, many multilingual speakers/writers often have blended their discourses to such a degree that they cannot self-identify with one discourse community. Therefore, if they see themselves as speaking and writing to several cultures at once, then an adherence to Standard English and a Standard English Only audience would be an unrealistic goal set by teachers that simplifies what they are trying to master (Horner and Trimbur 612-613). The better way to develop linguistic competence, the authors argue, is to let writers participate in “heritage language,” a language the writers identify with even if they do not speak it and “language crossing,” whereby students in other ethnic groups use minority languages that are not a part of their ethnic groups (Horner and Trimbur 613).

The notion that if one follows a “fixed sequence of language development” one will “move toward an ideal state of competence” (Horner and Trimbur 614) is an idea attached to Standard English in the classroom and in text design. But the same notion

that language development in nonstandard languages lead to competence in writing and testing is not synonymous with alternative discourse usage. The authors question this ideal, since if minorities identify with social groups outside of mainstream English, they may define competence in terms of mastering *languages* rather than in mastering a single language. A second ideal is that writing in Standard English is a fixed form, so that once students master how to write this fixed form, they will succeed in school and beyond in their careers. Conversely, if the student does not master writing forms, teachers will view that student's written work as "belonging outside the academy, foreign to its ways" and the placement essay exam is seen as concrete evidence of the otherness (Horner and Trimbur 614). Moreover, there is the notion that languages are separated as well as fixed and that boundaries do exist between home and school languages. Where does this leave the alternative discourse student writer? I would suggest that the portfolio method would fit the Horner and Trimbur ideal because the student could write a Standard English Only piece that would be required by the teacher but could also write a creative piece for his portfolio and both pieces would carry equal weight in terms of the grade. The single test assessment could not permit such creative writing unless the rubric changed to include nonstandard languages and the test questions were mixed, with some requiring Standard English Only and some requiring alternative discourses, with the student able to choose the one to which he or she wanted to respond.

The teacher perceptions that are harmful here as exemplified in proficiency exams are that minority students are not separating languages within the academic arena, are bringing their home languages with them, and are foreigners who should not reside in the academic institution, with the conclusion that these students cannot write correctly. All of these perceptions work counter to Composition Studies that encourages students to

bring what they know to the writing situation, and to take authority over their written work. In addition, the notion that their languages are wrong in the institution and right in their outside communities sends a mixed message to students that English is both fixed (in the institution), and fluid (outside the institution). The notion of a fixed language at the expense of elevating the Standard contradicts the best wisdom of composition rhetoric, again because in fixed-language ideology, “Writing itself, like language, is understood in reified form, rather than as a set of heterogeneous and shifting practices” (Horner and Trimbur 614). Students, therefore, are not taught that English is a constructed language in the same way as blended, alternative languages are spoken and written. The English Proficiency Exam may allow us to reshift the focus from viewing Standard English and the absolute conventions it entails to using the test as a means for discussing and providing access to writing that is culturally-based and that epitomizes student autonomy. By terminating the old test and subsequent sensing the need to analyze what it said to students, William Carey has taken a courageous step toward expanding the possibilities of Standard Academic English.

APPENDIX A

WILLIM CAREY COLLEGE'S ENGLISH PROFICIENCY EXAM TOPICS

Select ONE of the following topics on which to write an essay. Write the number of the topic you select in the top right hand corner of the EPE application side of this sheet (for example: 1C).

Label the front of one blue book **FINAL DRAFT**. Label the front of the second blue book **PRE-WRITING**. Use the **PRE-WRITING** blue book for brainstorming before writing the essay. Use whatever method of brainstorming that works best for you—freewriting, listing, outlining, etc.

After brainstorming in the **PRE-WRITING** blue book, double space on the front and back of the pages in the **FINAL DRAFT** blue book until the essay is finished. Save the first line in the **FINAL DRAFT** blue book for a title. Before turning in your essay, be sure to write a title on this first line. (A title for 1C might be *My Awakening*.)

When you have finished the essay, complete the following: (1) show the test administrator a picture I.D. (student or driver's license); (2) sign the exit roster; and (3) give the test administrator this sheet and the two blue books. Keep the instruction sheet for future use. **ONLY ONE PERSON AT A TIME SHOULD GIVE THE TEST ADMINISTRATOR HIS/HER ENGLISH PROFICIENCY EXAM MATERIAL.**

1. Write an essay on one of the following statements, using examples to illustrate your ideas. You should be able to draw some of your examples from personal experience and firsthand observation.
 - A. Fads never go out of style.
 - B. Television has produced a number of "classic" programs.
 - C. Every college campus has its own unique slang terms.
 - D. Making excuses sometimes seems like a national pastime.
 - E. A liberal arts education can have many practical applications.
2. At college you have the opportunity to meet many new people, students as well as teachers. Share your impressions of these people with a friend or family member. In a letter to someone back home, describe one of your new acquaintances. Try to capture the essence of the person you choose and explain why this person stands out from all the other people you have met at school.
3. Narrate an experience that gave you a new awareness of yourself. Use enough telling detail in your narrative to help your reader visualize your experience and understand its significance for you. Use the following suggestions to write your narrative in first person:
 - A. My greatest success
 - B. My biggest failure
 - C. My most embarrassing moment
 - D. My happiest moment
 - E. The experience that was the most important turning point in my life
4. Write an essay comparing and contrasting two things. Be sure that your essay has a definite purpose and a clear direction. Choose from the following topics:
 - A. Two methods of dieting
 - B. Two television situation comedies
 - C. Two types of summer employment
 - D. Two people who display different attitudes toward responsibility
5. Some of the most pressing social issues in American life today are further complicated by imprecise definitions of critical terms. Various medical cases, for example, have brought worldwide attention to the legal and medical definitions of the word death. Select one of the following words, and write an essay in which you discuss not only the definition of the term but also the problems associated with defining it:

| | |
|-----------------------|--------------|
| A. Morality | E. Insanity |
| B. Academic integrity | F. Happiness |
| C. Pornography | G. Equality |
| D. Censorship | |
6. Think of something on your campus or in your community that you would like to see changed. Write a persuasive argument that explains what is wrong and how you think it ought to be changed.
7. Think of a product that you like and want to use even though it has an annoying feature. Write a letter of complaint in which you attempt to persuade the manufacturer to improve the product. Your letter should include the following points:
 - A statement concerning the nature of the problem
 - Evidence supporting or explaining your complaint
 - Suggestions for improving the product
8. All college students have to register for courses each term. What is the registration process like at William Carey College? Do you find any part of the process unnecessarily frustrating or annoying? In a letter to the campus newspaper, *The Cobbler*, or an appropriate administrator, evaluate WCC's current registration procedure, offering suggestions for making the process more efficient and pleasurable.

APPENDIX B

APPLICATION AND RUBRIC



William Carey University

English Proficiency Exam Application

All students desiring to be awarded a degree from William Carey University *must take and pass* the English Proficiency Examination (EPE). Any student who fails the examination must enroll in and pass ENG 105: Essentials of Grammar and Writing Laboratory.

Students taking the EPE are required to write a well-organized and well-developed essay of approximately 500 words in a two-hour time period. The subject of the essay must be drawn from the list of subjects on the back of this sheet. Be careful that your essay does, indeed, match the subject you have chosen from the list: Essays of any quality written on a subject not on the list will not be acceptable.

The EPE evaluative criteria are as follows: Papers with a 6, 5, or 4 score will receive a PASS for the EPE; papers with a 3, 2, or 1 score will receive a FAIL for the EPE.

☐ **A score of 6: The essay demonstrates a high degree of proficiency in writing, though it may have minor errors.**

Proficient Content: Organization and Development

- _____ (1) It is well organized and well developed.
- _____ (2) It uses appropriate details to support a thesis or illustrate ideas.
- _____ (3) It shows unity, coherence, and progression.

Proficient Facility with Language: Word Choice, Sentence Style and Structure

- _____ (4) It demonstrates syntactic variety.

Proficient Facility with Language: Mechanics and Usage

- _____ (5) It displays clear facility in the use of language.

☐ **A score of 5: The essay clearly demonstrates proficiency in writing, though it may have minor errors.**

Proficient Content: Organization and Development

- _____ (1) It is well organized and well developed, though it may have fewer details than does a 6 paper.
- _____ (2) It shows unity, coherence, and progression.

Proficient Facility with Language: Word Choice, Sentence Style and Structure

- _____ (3) It demonstrates syntactic variety.

Proficient Facility with Language: Mechanics and Usage

- _____ (4) It displays clear facility in the use of language, though it may not be as fluid as a 6 paper.

☐ **A score of 4: The essay demonstrates proficiency in writing, though it may have occasional errors.**

Proficient Content: Organization and Development

- _____ (1) It is adequately organized and developed.
- _____ (2) It uses some details to support a thesis or illustrate ideas.

Proficient Facility with Language: Word Choice, Sentence Style and Structure

- _____ (3) It demonstrates adequate facility with the language.

Proficient Facility with Language: Mechanics and Usage

- _____ (4) It may contain occasional writing errors, but they will be neither serious nor frequent.

☐ **A score of 3: The essay may demonstrate some proficiency in writing, but it is clearly flawed.**

The essay will have one or more of the following weaknesses:

Not Proficient in Content: Organization and Development

- _____ (1) It reflects inadequate organization and development.
- _____ (2) It fails to support a thesis or illustrate generalizations with appropriate detail.

Not Proficient in Facility with Language: Word Choice, Sentence Style and Structure

- _____ (3) It uses limited and inappropriate word choice, sentence style, and structure.

Not Proficient in Facility with Language: Mechanics and Usage

- _____ (4) It has a pattern or accumulation of errors in mechanics, usage, or sentence structure. (6 or more errors)

☐ **A score of 2: The essay suggests a lack of proficiency in writing, reflecting one or more of the following weaknesses.**

Not Proficient in Content: Organization and Development

- _____ (1) It reflects inadequate organization and development.
- _____ (2) It demonstrates little or no detail or uses irrelevant specifics.

Not Proficient in Facility with Language: Word Choice, Sentence Style and Structure, and Mechanics & Usage

- _____ (3) It contains serious errors in mechanics, usage, or sentence structure. (6 or more errors)

☐ **A score of 1: The essay demonstrates a complete lack of proficiency in writing.**

An essay in this category contains serious and persistent writing errors and may also be illogical, incoherent, or severely underdeveloped.

Using the above criteria, two people evaluate each essay. If there is a discrepancy, a third person rates the essay. The results of the exam will be included with your grade report at the end of the trimester.

APPENDIX C

WILLIAM CAREY UNIVERSITY ENGLISH PROFICIENCY CURRICULUM

SURVEY WINTER 2009

Directions: Your response to this online survey will be used to determine the types of writing assignments required in your department. The English faculty will review the results in order to scaffold more co-operative programs, which support the writing experiences in your department. Questions 1-12 and 19-21 were developed by the English faculty at Carey, and Questions 13-18 were adapted from a published source (Weiser, Irwin. "Local Research and Curriculum Development: Using Surveys to Learn About Writing Assignments in the Disciplines." The Writing Program Administrator as Researcher, 1999). Please submit the completed survey online by December 4, 2009.

Q1. Over the course of a year, how many courses do you teach that require at least two papers?

- ☐ One-two
- ☐ Three-four
- ☐ Over four
- ☐ None

Q2. When students work with sources, which topic of discussion elicits the most of your time in the classroom?

- ☐ How to find sources
- ☐ How to integrate sources
- ☐ What is plagiarism
- ☐ How to cite sources
- ☐ How to write a bibliography
- ☐ Other

Q3. In your opinion, what is the most difficult aspect of writing a student writer faces in your class?

- ☐ Attempting to avoid plagiarism
- ☐ Staying on topic
- ☐ Finding adequate sources
- ☐ Using grammar and punctuation
- ☐ Other

Q4. What do you do when students exhibit poor academic skills in writing?

- ☐ Refer them to Student Support Services
- ☐ Tell them to see you for one-on-one conferencing
- ☐ Refer or assign them to take basic writing classes in the English department
- ☐ Consider your paper comments to be mini-lessons on writing
- ☐ Other

Q5. What skills would have to be strengthened for the poor writer to perform better in your class?

- ☐ Paragraph-level skills
- ☐ Grammar-level skills
- ☐ Critical-thinking skills
- ☐ All of the above
- ☐ None of the above

Q6. What habits would have to change for the poor writer to perform better?

- ☐ Listening habits
- ☐ Reading habits
- ☐ Discipline
- ☐ All of the above
- ☐ None of the above

Q7. How often do you see a student who has a physical or mental disability that hinders his or her writing process?

- ☐ Often
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

Q8. Is the use of revision of writing part of your curriculum?

- ☐ Often
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

Q9. How often do you use an evaluative grading rubric for your writing assignments?

- ☐ Often
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

Q10. Are there any writing assignments not graded?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Q11. Would you like writing to be a more central focal point in your teaching than what is already in place?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Q12. The goal of Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) based writing centers is to ensure standard proficiency levels in English across campus in any major. Another goal of such a center is to provide resources on writing topics helpful for teachers. If this Writing Center service were available free of charge, would you encourage your students to attend?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

Q13. Do you require students to use PowerPoint or some other computer software for presentations?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

Q14. Do you require writing in (click all that apply):

- ☐ 100-level courses
☐ 200-level courses
☐ 300-level courses
☐ 400-level courses

Q15. In response to question 14, which of the following best describe the writing assignments you make (click all that apply):

| | 100-level | 200 | 300 | 400 |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Short answer (1-5 sentences exam responses) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Several paragraph-length essay -exam responses | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Reviews of books or articles | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Short (7-12 pages) documented research papers | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Longer research papers | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Longer research papers | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Original research projects (case studies, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (please specify) <input type="text"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Q16. Approximately how much writing do you require of students during a trimester (click all that apply):

| | 100-level | 200 | 300 | 400 |
|--------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Fewer than 5 pages | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5-10 pages | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10-20 pages | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 20-40 pages | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 40 pages or more | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| None | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Q17. Approximately how much time do students have to complete most writing assignments?

- ☐ One class period
- ☐ One week
- ☐ Two weeks
- ☐ Three weeks
- ☐ Four weeks

Q18. Do your writing assignments ask your students to (click all that apply):

- ☐ Display an understanding of course materials
- ☐ Apply a theory or concept to a situation or problem
- ☐ Propose a solution to a problem
- ☐ Respond to a text, performance, or personal experience Review or summarize others' positions
- ☐ Argue a position
- ☐ Practice writing in a form often employed in your discipline (e.g., a proposal, technical report, review)
- ☐ Other (please explain)

Q19. Which long writing format does your discipline use the most to assist students with their writing proficiency?

- ☐ The essay
- ☐ The report
- ☐ The research paper
- ☐ The essay exam
- ☐ Other (please explain)

Q20. Which short writing format does your discipline use the most to assist students with their writing proficiency?

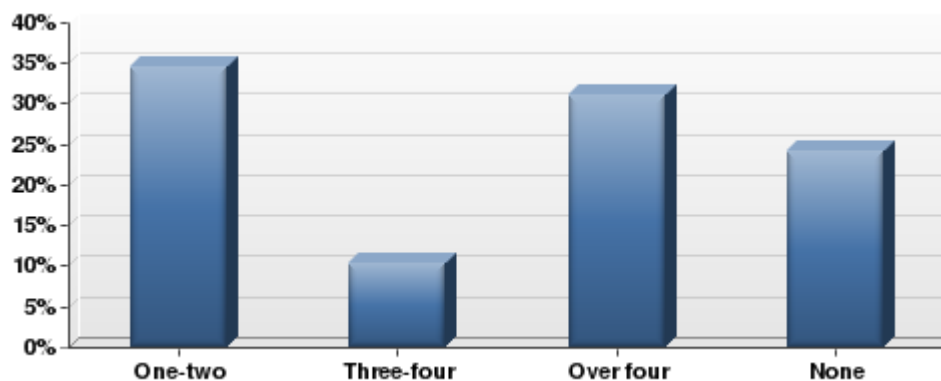
- ☐ Questions at the end of a chapter in their textbook
- ☐ Discussion questions you created that must be used for all of their readings
- ☐ Journal writing
- ☐ Short answer responses to test questions
- ☐ Other (please explain)

Q21. Based on the writing experiences in your classroom, how would you define basic writing competency?

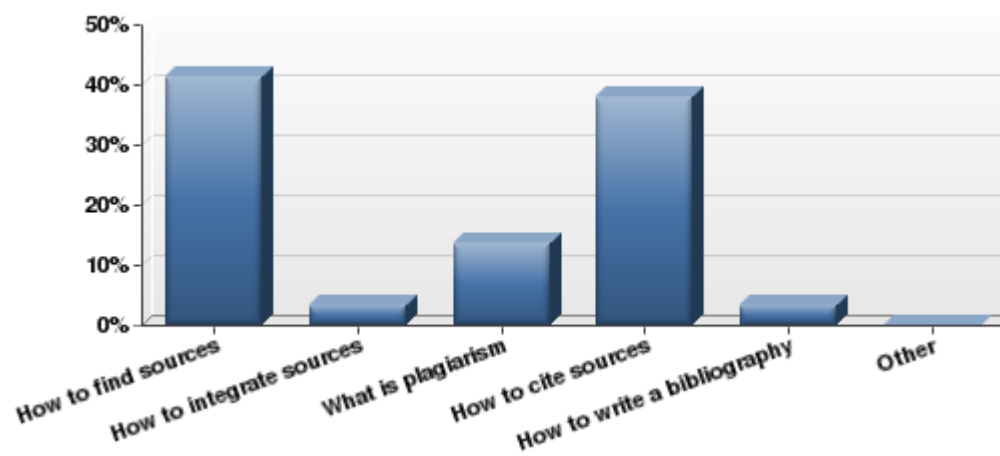
APPENDIX D

SURVEY QUESTION RESULTS

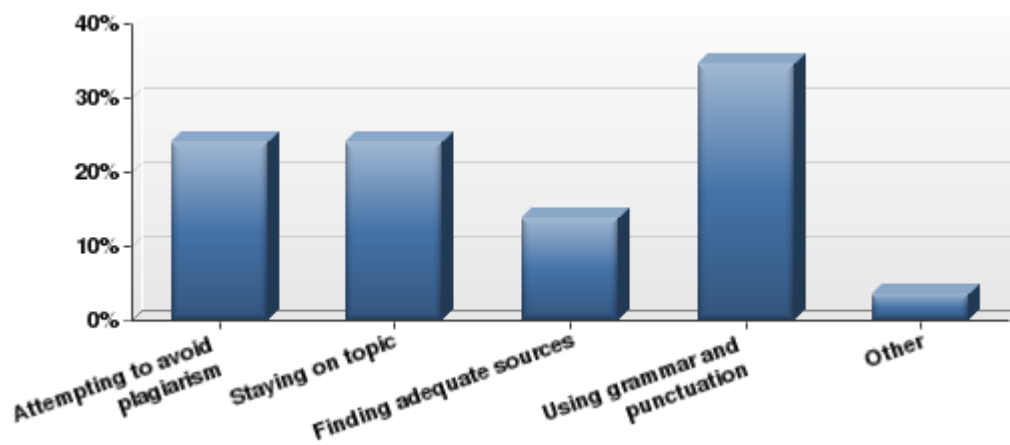
1. Over the course of a year, how many courses do you teach that require at least two papers?



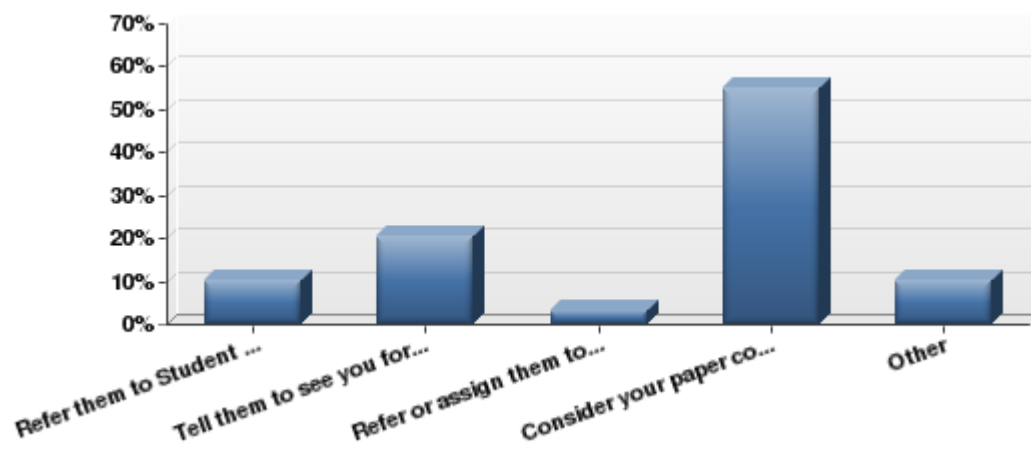
2. When students work with sources, which topic of discussion elicits the most of your time in the classroom?



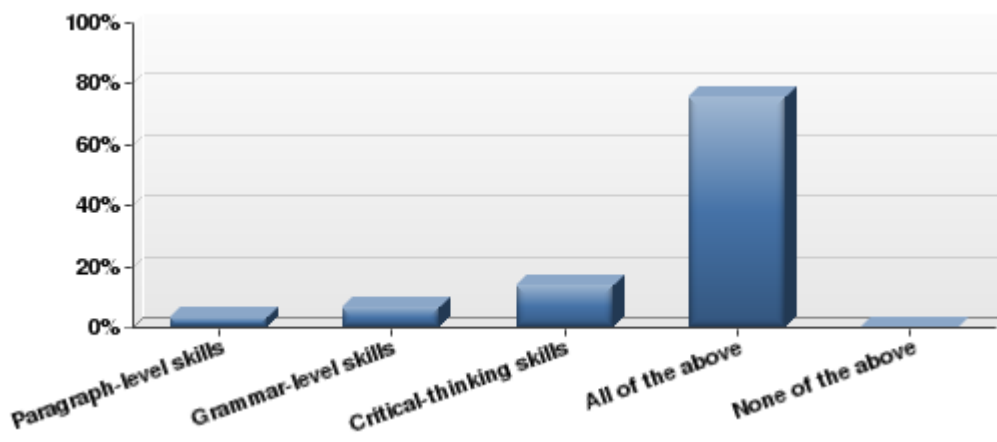
3. In your opinion, what is the most difficult aspect of writing a student writer faces in your class?



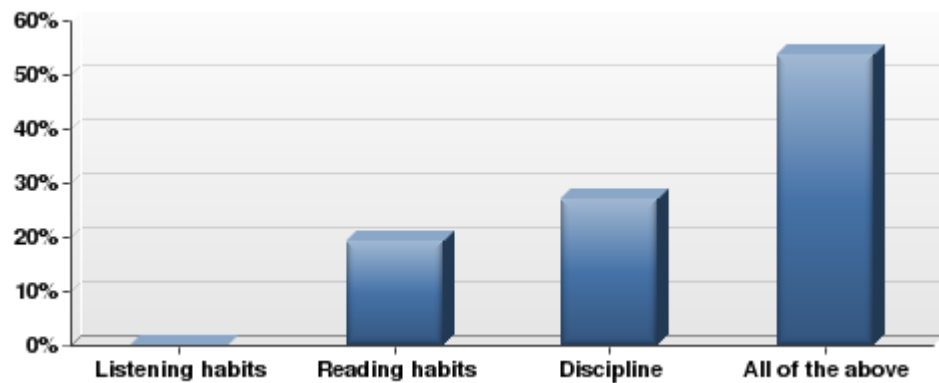
4. What do you do when students exhibit poor academic skills in writing?



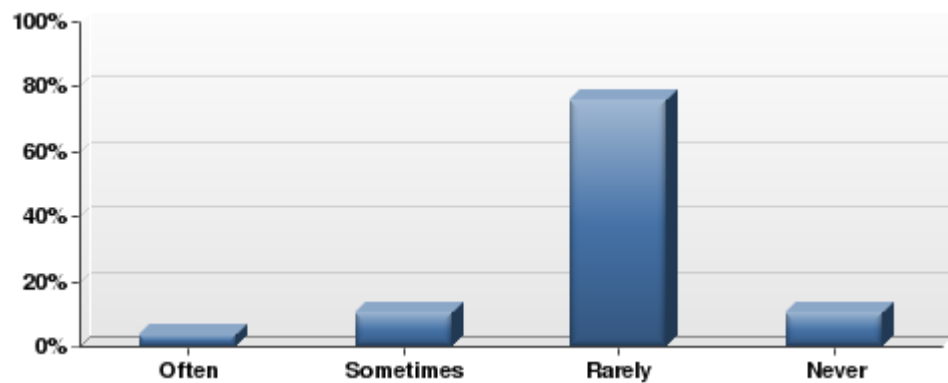
5. What skills would have to be strengthened for the poor writer to perform better in your class?



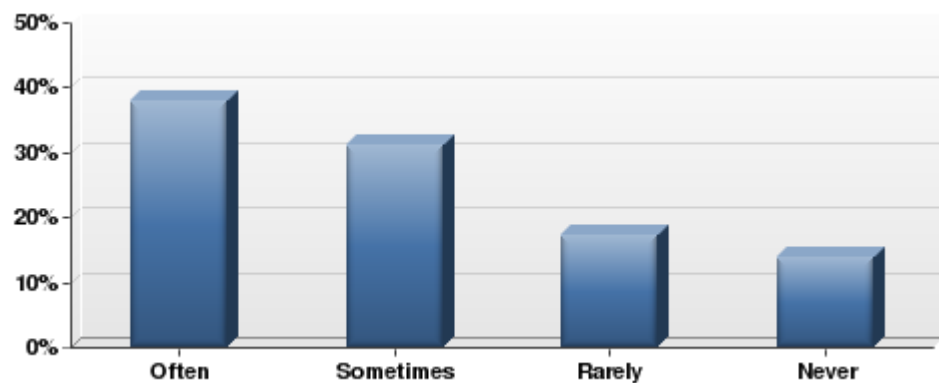
6. What habits would have to change for the poor writer to perform better?



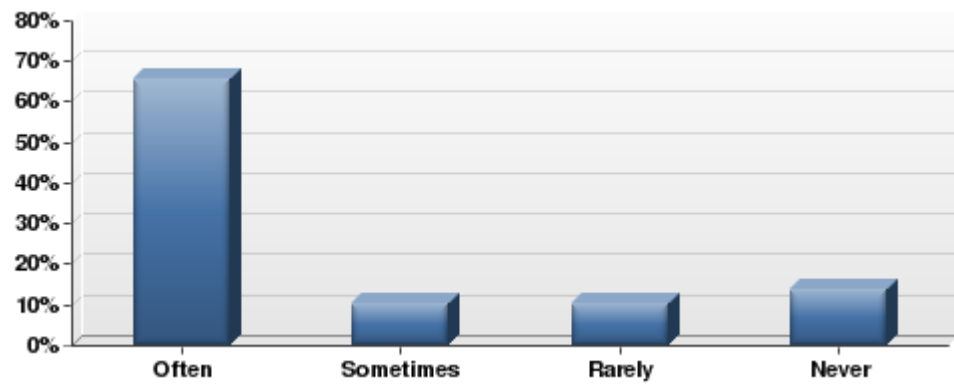
7. How often do you see a student who has a physical or mental disability that hinders his or her writing process?



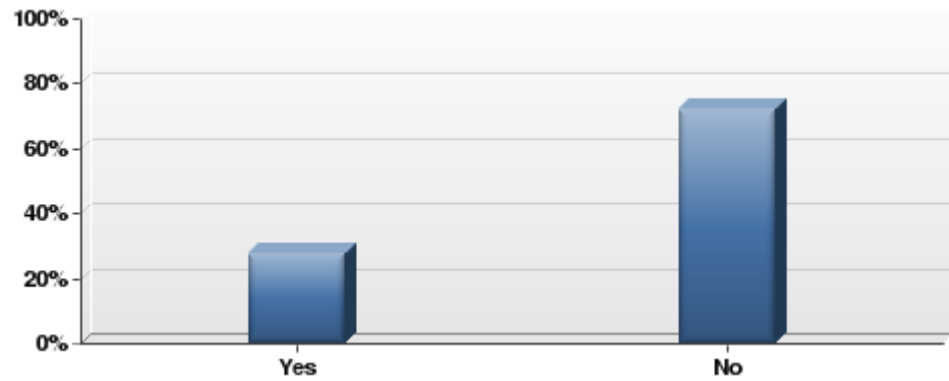
8. Is the use of revision of writing part of your curriculum?



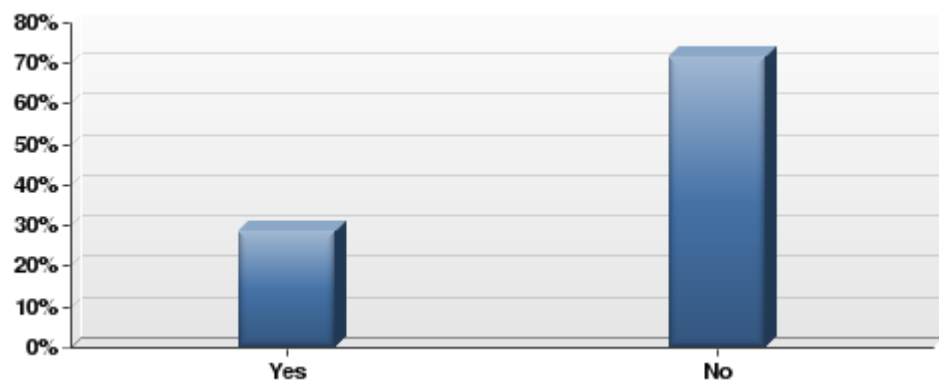
9. How often do you use an evaluative grading rubric for your writing assignments?



10. Are there any writing assignments not graded?



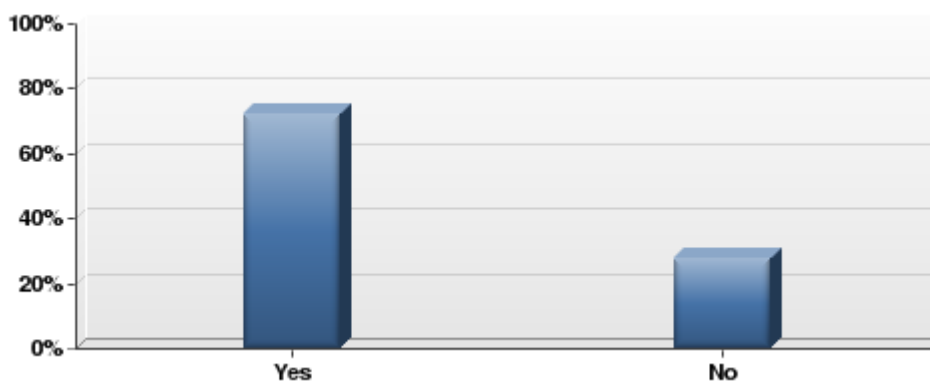
11. Would you like writing to be a more central focal point in your teaching than what is already in place?



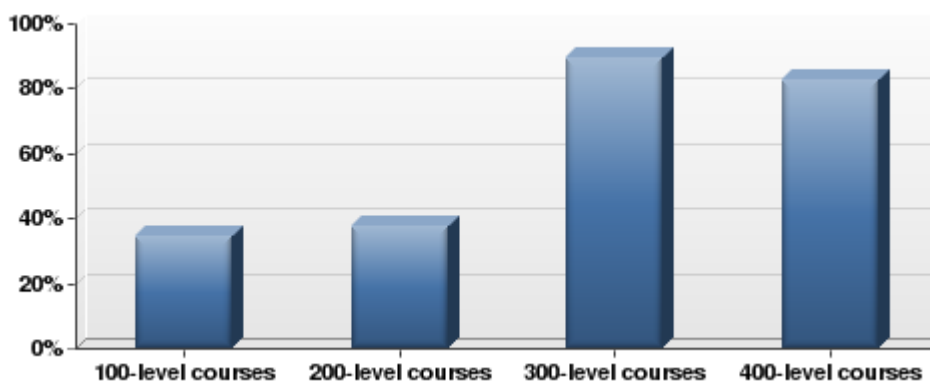
12. The goal of Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) based writing centers is to ensure standard proficiency levels in English across campus in any major. Another goal of such a center is to provide resources on writing topics helpful for teachers. If this Writing Center service were available free of charge, would you encourage your students to attend?



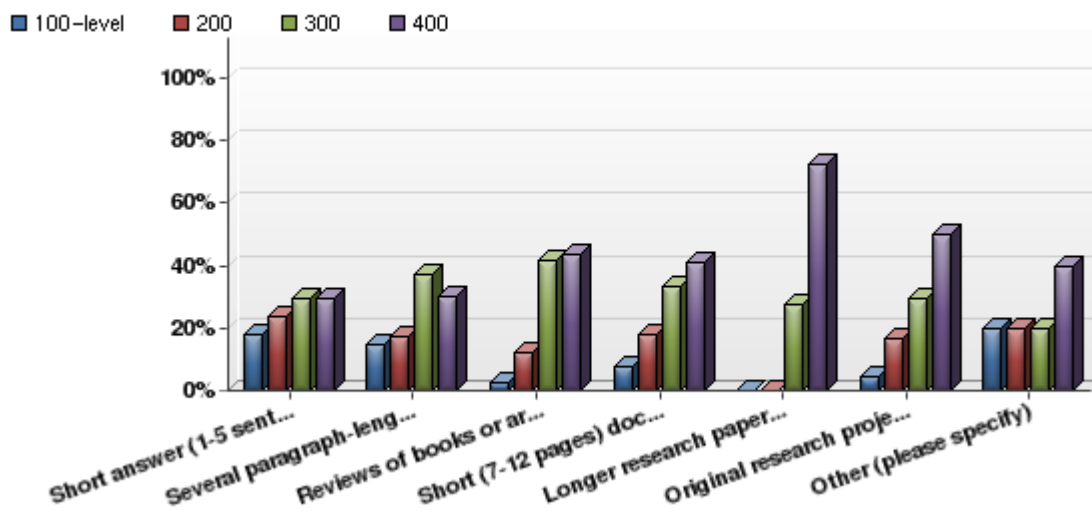
13. Do you require students to use PowerPoint or some other computer software for presentations?



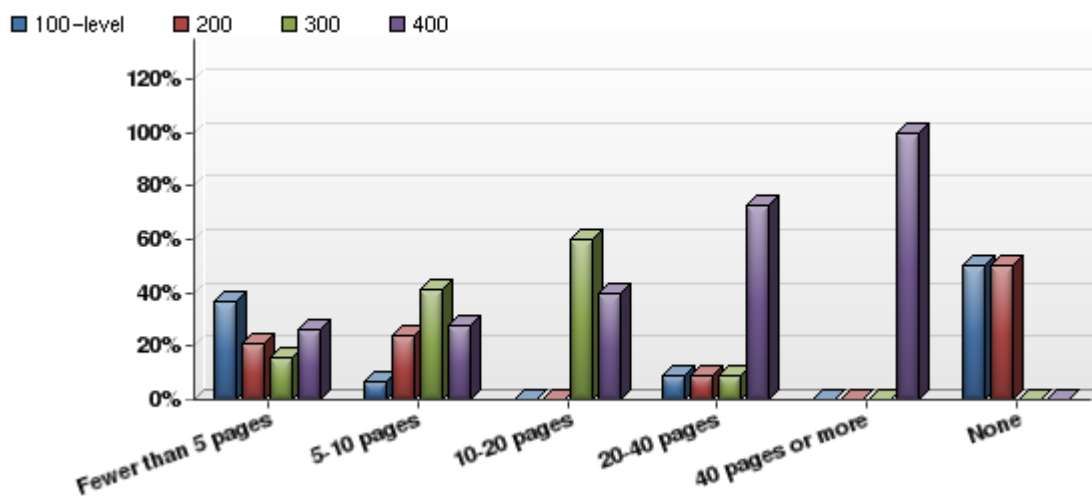
14. Do you require writing in (click all that apply):



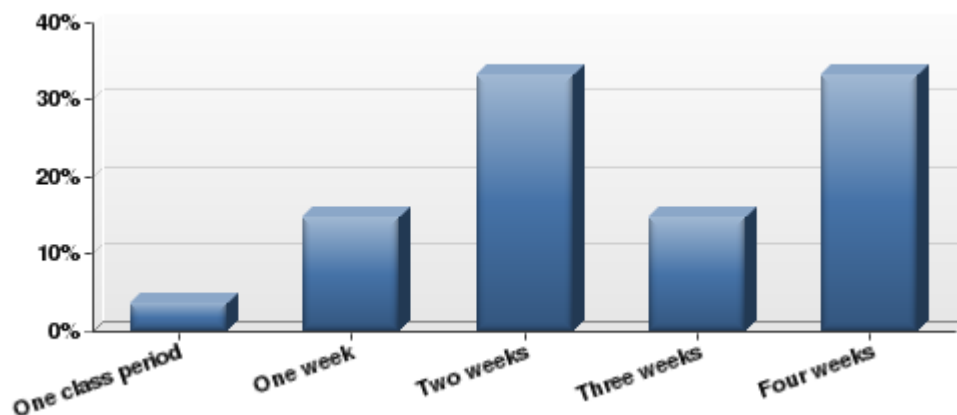
15. In response to question 14, which of the following best describe the writing assignments you make (click all that apply):



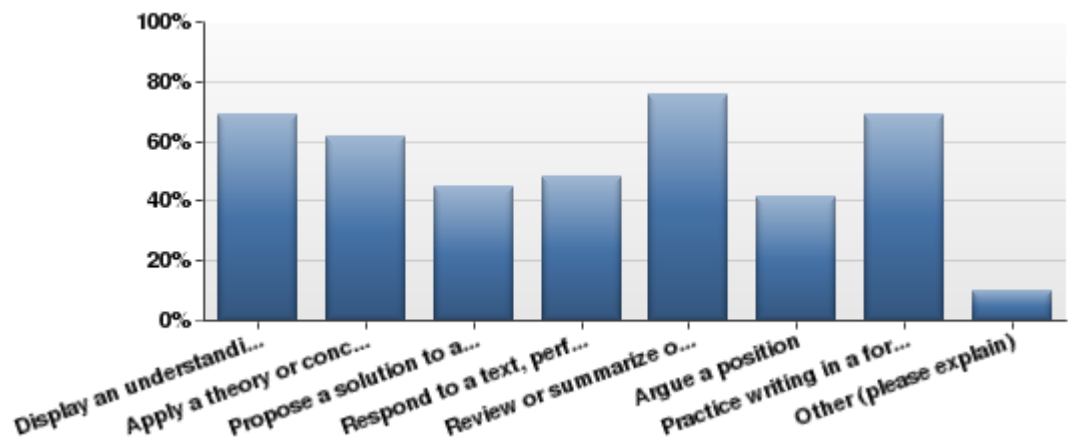
16. Approximately how much writing do you require of students during a trimester (click all that apply):



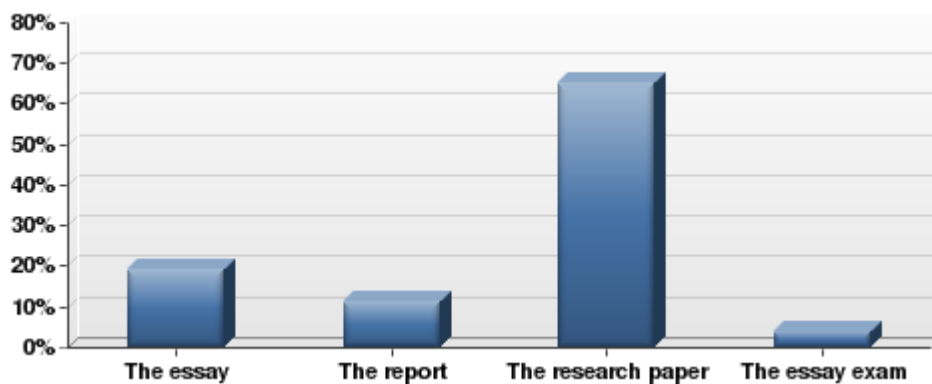
17. Approximately how much time do students have to complete most writing assignments?



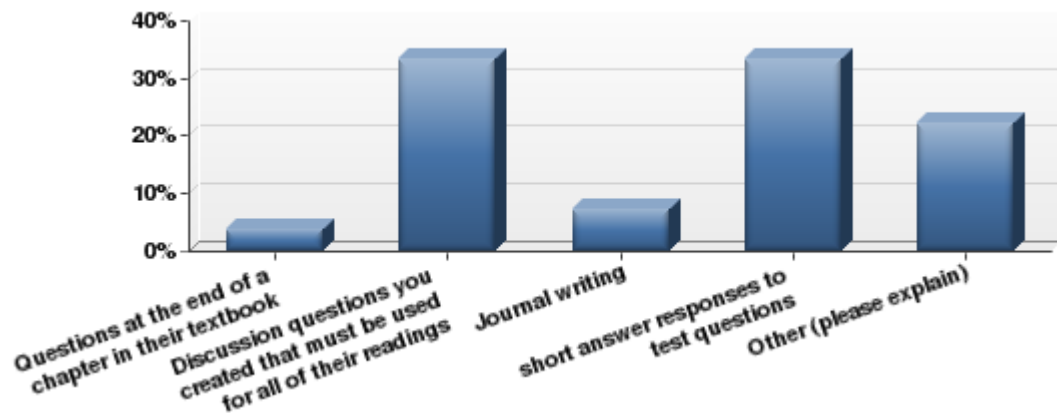
18. Do your writing assignments ask your students to (click all that apply):



19. Which long writing format does your discipline use the most to assist students with their writing proficiency?



20. Which short writing format does your discipline use the most to assist students with their writing proficiency?



21. Based on the writing experiences in your classroom, how would you define basic writing competency?

Text Response

Basic Writing Competency is the developed skill sets to provide communication through comprehensible written English

The students at WCU can not write. They have poor organizational skills. They do not know how to find and evaluate proper sources,

The ability to communicate ideas clearly in writing

The ability to express and organize ideas clearly using proper grammar and technical terminology

Department-Nursing, proper sentence construction, paragraph construction, subject-verb agreement, use of APA format

the ability to locate and evaluate the writing of others and incorporate the information thus gained in an original composition that exhibits structure, logical flow, and coherent statements.

The ability to construct a meaningful, plain English sentence with no grammar or spelling errors.

Engagement with the source material, the use of proper grammar, and most importantly (at least at this point) NOT plagiarizing. - History Department

HORRIFIC!! The lack of punctuatuion and grammar skills is beyond poor.

The ability to articulate an idea or position in a grammatically correct format.

They have fairly good writing skills with a few problems in grammar and a lot of punctuation problems. School of Education

Reading comprehension, synthesis of material, summarizing positions/views, use of correct grammar, ability to cite, etc.

The ability to get ones thoughts across to others and to use standard English to

communicate.

Basic writing competency requires spelling, grammatical, cohesion, and content comprehension skills that promote few errors on the part of the writer.

Owens-Education: The ability to organize thoughts, write grammatically correct and project clarity of thought/ideas

The ability to communicate critical ideas in the discipline and within the general culture constitutes an important life skill.

Language and Literature: varies between extremes, from very poor with most sentences flawed to exceptional with almost no flaws

Decent

Students who write well in my art classes demonstrate their ability to communicate their ideas with clarity, efficiency, and depth.

Horrendous. Often, book reports and essay writings are completely unintelligible! crappy!!! If you can't speak English (first language - or second - then you can't write it either!!

Typically, students only know how to write in essay form. Most students are unfamiliar with how to write academically. Also, students oftentimes do not understand plagiarism. Some students have significant problems with grammar, punctuation, and spelling. In fact, some students are unable to critically think and put arguments together in a coherent manner. Oftentimes, students make claims in their writing, but are unable to substantiate those claims. Personally, I believe most students at William Carey fall into two categories: 1) students with excellent writing skills that can easily be taught to write at a higher level (beyond personal opinions) or 2) students that are woefully unprepared to write at the most basic level.

ability to compose basic paragraphs around a theme/title or subject; utilizing correct grammar and punctuation; summarize and critique information.

Good sentence structure. Cohesive thoughts.

| Statistic | Value |
|-----------------|-------|
| Total Responses | 24 |

APPENDIX E

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION



THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

Institutional Review Board

118 College Drive #5147
 Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
 Tel: 601.266.6820
 Fax: 601.266.5509
 www.usm.edu/irb

**HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION REVIEW COMMITTEE
 NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION**

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Human Subjects Protection Review Committee in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.
 Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: **10021801**

PROJECT TITLE: **What's in a Test?: Constructions of Literacy and It's Implications for Test Design**

PROPOSED PROJECT DATES: **08/01/2009 to 10/31/2010**

PROJECT TYPE: **Dissertation or Thesis**

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: **Josye Brookter**


COLLEGE/DIVISION: **College of Arts & Letters**

DEPARTMENT: **English**

FUNDING AGENCY: **N/A**

HSPRC COMMITTEE ACTION: **Exempt Approval**

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: **03/09/2010 to 03/08/2011**



 Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
 HSPRC Chair

3-11-10

 Date

WORKS CITED

- Babin, Edith, and Kimberly Harrison. *Contemporary Composition Studies: A Guide to Theorists and Terms*. Westport: Greenwood, 1999. Print.
- Barrientos, Tanya. "Se Habla Espanol." *The Norton Field Guide to Writing*. Ed. Richard Bullock, Maureen Daly Goggin, and Francine Weinberg. New York: Norton, 2010. Print.
- Bartholomae, David. "Inventing the University." *When a Writer Can't Write: Studies in Writer's Block and Other Composing Process Problems*. Ed. Mike Rose. New York: Guilford, 1985. Print.
- Banks, James. Foreword. *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*. Geneva Gay. New York: Teacher's College Press, 2000. Print.
- Baugh, John. *Black Street Speech: Its History, Structure and Survival*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1983. Print.
- Behrens, Laurence, and Leonard J. Rosen. *Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1985. Print.
- Belanoff, Pat. "The Myth of Assessment." *Journal of Basic Writing* 10 (Spring 1991): 54-66. Print.
- Berlin, James A. "Contemporary Composition: The Major Pedagogical Theories." *College English* 44.8 (December 1982): 765-77. Print.
- . "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class." *College English* 50.5 (September 1988): 477-94. Print.
- Bernstein, Basil. "A Public Language: Some Sociological Implications of a Linguistic Form." *The British Journal of Sociology* (2010): 53-69. Print.

- Bizzell, Patricia. *Academic Discourse and Critical Consciousness*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1992. Print.
- . "Foundationalism and Anti-Foundationalism in Composition Studies." Bizzell. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1992. Print.
- . "The Intellectual Work of 'Mixed' Forms of Academic Discourses." Schroeder, Fox, Bizzell 1-12. Print.
- . "Review: What Can We Know, What Must We Do, What May We Hope: Writing Assessment." *College English* 49.5 (September 1987): 575-84. Print.
- . "What Happens When Basic Writers Come to College?" *College Composition and Communication* 37 (1986): 294-301. Print.
- Bleich, David. *The Double Perspective: Language, Literacy and Social Relations*. New York: Oxford UP, 1988. Print.
- Bloom, Lynn Z. "Freshman Composition as a Middle-Class Enterprise." *College English* 58.6 (October 1996): 654-75. Print.
- Daiker, Donald, and Edward White. *Composition in the Twenty-First Century Crisis and Change*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1996. Print.
- Broad, Bob. *What We Really Value: Beyond Rubrics in Teaching and Assessing Writing*. Logan: Utah State UP, 2003. Print.
- . "'Portfolio Scoring': A Contradiction in Terms." *New Directions in Portfolio Assessment: Reflective Practice, Critical Theory, and Large-Scale Scoring*. Ed. Laurel Black, Donald Daiker, Jeffrey Sommers, and Gail Stygall. Boynton/Cook, 1994. Print.

- . "Pulling Your Hair Out: Crisis of Standardization in Communal Writing Assessment." *Research in the Teaching of English* 35.2 (November 2000): 213-60. Print.
- Bullock, Richard, Maureen Daly Goggin, and Francine Weinberg. *The Norton Field Guide to Writing*. 2nd ed. New York: Norton, 2010. Print.
- Campbell, Kermit. "Gettin Our Groove On": *Rhetoric, Language, and Literacy*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2005. Print.
- Canagarajah, A. Suresh. "The Place of World Englishes in Composition: Pluralization Continued." *College Composition and Communication* 57.4 (June 2006): 586-619. Print.
- . "Safe Houses in the Contact Zone: Coping Strategies of African American Students in the Academy." *College Composition and Communication* 48.2 (1997): 173-196. Print.
- CCCC Committee on Assessment. "Writing Assessment: A Position Statement. The Conference on College Composition and Communication." Mar. 2009. Web. 14 Jan. 2010.
- Charney, Davida. "The Validity of Using Holistic Scoring to Evaluate Writing: A Critical Overview." *Research in the Teaching of English* 18 (February 1984): 65-81. Print.
- Clifford, John, and Elizabeth Ervin. "The Ethics of Process." *Post-Process Theory: Beyond the Writing-Process Paradigm*. Ed. Thomas Kent. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1999. 179-97. Print.
- Clifford, John and John Schilb. *Writing Theory and Critical Theory*. New York: MLA, 1994. Print.

Cooper, Charles, ed. *The Nature and Measurement of Competency in English*.

Urbana: NCTE, 1980. Print.

Daiute, Colette, and Hollie Jones. "Diversity Discourses: Reading Race and Ethnicity in and Around Children's Writing." *Making Race Visible: Literacy Research for Cultural Understanding*. Ed. Stuart Greene and Dawn Abt-Perkins. New York: Teacher's College, Columbia U, 2003. Print.

Davis, Ossie. "The English Language is My Enemy, 1967." *The Hope and the Legacy: The Past, Present and Future of 'Students' Right to Their Own Language'*. Ed. Patrick Bruch and Richard Marback. Cresskill: Hampton P, 2005. 3-9. Print.

Definition Prompt. English Proficiency Exam Application. William Carey U., n.d. Print.

Delpit, Lisa D. "The Politics of Teaching Literate Discourse." *Others People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*. New York: New Press, 1995. Print.

Diederich, Paul. *Measuring Growth in English*. Urbana: NCTE, 1974. Print.

Dorbin, Sidney. "A Problem with Writing (about) 'Alternative Discourse.'"

Schroeder, Fox, and Bizzell. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 2002. Print.

Dubison, Michael. "Whose Paper is This, Anyway? Why Most Students Don't Embrace the Writing They do for Their Writing Classes." *What is College-Level Writing?* Ed. Patrick Sullivan and Howard Tinberg. Urbana: NCTE, 2006. 92-109. Print.

Dyson, Michael Eric. *The Michael Eric Dyson Reader*. New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2004. Print.

- Ede, Lisa. *Situating Composition: Composition Studies and the Politics of Location*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2004. Print.
- Elbow, Peter. "Vernacular Englishes in the Writing Classroom? Probing the Culture of Literacy." Schroeder, Fox, Bizzell 126-38. Print.
- . "Writing Assessment: Do It Better, Do It Less." White, Lutz, and Kamusikiri. New York: MLA, 1996. Print.
- Elliot, Norbert. *On a Scale: A Social History of Writing Assessment*. New York: Peter Lang, 2005. Print.
- Enciso, Patricia E. "Reading Discrimination." *Making Race Visible: Literacy Research for Cultural Understanding*. Eds. Stuart Greene and Dawn Abt-Perkins. New York: Teacher's College P, 2003. 149-77. Print.
- Englehard, George Jr., Belita Gordon, and Stephen Gabrielson. "The Influences of Mode of Discourse, Experiential Demand, and Gender on the Quality of Student Writing." *Research in the Teaching of English* 26.3 (October 1992): 315-36. Print.
- Faigley, Lester. "Competing Theories of Process: A Critique and a Proposal." *College English* 48.6 (October 1986): 527-42. Print.
- Faigley, Lester, Roger D. Cherry, David A. Jolliffe, and Anna M. Skinner. *Assessing Writers' Knowledge and Processes of Composing*. Norwood: Ablex, 1985. Print.
- Farr, Marcia, and Gloria Nardini. "Essayist Literacy and Sociolinguistic Difference." White, Lutz, and Kamusikiri 108-19. Print.

- Flower, Linda. *The Construction of Negotiated Meaning: A Social Cognitive Theory of Writing*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1994. Print.
- . "Literate Action." Bloom, Daiker, and White 249-60. Print.
- Flower, Linda, and John R. Hayes, "A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing." *College Composition and Communication* 32.4 (Dec. 1981): 365-87. Print.
- Fordham, Signthia, and John Ogbu. "Black Students' School Success: Coping with the Burden of 'Acting White.'" *Urban Review* 18.3 (1986): 181-35. Print.
- Freire, Paulo. *Education: The Practice of Freedom*. London: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, 1976. Print.
- . *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Trans. Myra Bergman Ramos. New York: Seabury, 1968. Print.
- Gay, Geneva. *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*. New York: Teacher's College Press, 2000. Print.
- Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973. Print.
- Gere, Anne Ruggles. "Written Composition: Toward a Theory of Evaluation." *College English* 42 (1980): 44-58. Print.
- Gilyard, Keith. "African Americans in Process." *Let's Flip the Script: An African American Discourse on Language, and Learning*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1996. Print.
- . "Cross-Talk: Toward Transcultural Writing Classrooms." Severino, Guerra, and Butler 325-31. Print.
- Gilyard, Keith, and Vorris Nunley, ed. *Rhetoric and Ethnicity*. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 2004. v-x. Print.

- Gilyard, Keith, Deborah Holdstein, and Charles Schuster. *Rhetorical Choices: A Reader for Writers*. New York: Longman, 2003. Print.
- Gordon, Barbara. "Another Look: Standardized Tests for Placement in College Composition Courses." *WPA: Writing Program Administration* 10.3 (Spring 1987): 29-38. Print.
- Hairston, Maxine. "Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing." *College Composition and Communication* 43.2 (May 1992): 179-95. Print.
- Hamp-Lyons, Liz. "The Challenges of Second-Language Writing Assessment." White, Lutz, and Kamsikiri 226-40. Print.
- Harklau, Linda, Kay Losey, and Meryl Siegal, ed. "Linguistically Diverse Students and College Writing: What is Equitable and Appropriate?" *Generation 1.5 Meets College Composition: Issues in the Teaching of Writing to U.S.-Educated Learners of ESL*. Mahwah: Erlbaum, 1999. Print.
- Health Care Prompt. English Proficiency Exam Application. William Carey U., n.d. Print.
- Heath, Shirley Brice. "Literate Traditions." *Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983. Print.
- Herrington, Anne. "The First Twenty Years of Research in the Teaching of English and the Growth of a Research Community." *Research in the Teaching of English* 23.2 (May 1989): 117-138. Print.

- Hill, Adams Sherman. *The Principles of Rhetoric and Their Application*. 1878. New York: Harper, 1892. Print.
- . "An Answer to the Cry for More English." *Good Company* 4 (1879-1880): 233-40. Print.
- hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.
- Horner, Bruce, and John Trimbur. "English Only and U. S. College Composition." *College Composition and Communication* 53 (2002): 594-630. Print.
- Hraba, Joseph. *American Ethnicity*. Itasca: Peacock Publishers, 1979. Print.
- Hull, Glynda, and Katherine Schultz, eds. *School's Out! Bridging Out-of-School Literacies with Classroom Practice*. New York: Teachers College P, 2002. Print.
- Huot, Brian. *(Re)Articulating Writing Assessment for Teaching and Learning*. Logan: Utah State P, 2002. Print.
- Inoue, Asao B. "Engaging with Assessment Technologies: Responding to Valuing Diversity as a WPA." *Writing Program Administration: Journal of the Council of Writing Program Administrators* 33:3 (Spring 2010): 134-38. Print.
- IPEDS 2010-2011. CAMS. William Carey University, 2010. Web.
- Johnston, Peter. "Constructive Evaluation and the Improvement of Teaching and Learning." *Teachers College Record* 90: 509-28. Print.
- Kamusikiri, Sandra. "African American English and Writing Assessment: An Afrocentric Approach." White, Lutz, and Kamusikiri 189-203. Print.
- Kochman, Thomas. *Black and White Styles in Conflict*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981. Print.

- Kynard, Carmen. "Writing While Black: The Colour Line, Black Discourses and Assessment in the Institutionalization of Writing Instruction." *English Teaching: Practice and Critique* 7.2 (September 2008): 4-34. Print.
- Ladson-Billings, Gloria. Foreword. *Making Race Visible: Literacy Research for Cultural Understanding*. New York: Teachers College P, 2003. Print.
- Long, Laura Lai. "Full (dis)Course Meal: Some Words on Hybrid/Alternative Discourses." Schroeder, Fox, Bizzell. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 2002. Print.
- Lunsford, Andrea A. "The Content of Basic Writers' Essays." *College Composition and Communication* 31.3 (Oct. 1980): 278-90. Print.
- . "What We Know—and Don't Know—About Remedial Writing." *College Composition and Communication* 29.1 (Feb. 1978): 47-52. Print.
- Lynne, Patricia. *Coming to Terms: A Theory of Writing Assessment*. Logan: Utah State UP, 2004. Print.
- Macedo, Donaldo. *Literacies of Power: What Americans are not Allowed to Know*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1994. Print.
- Martin, Ben. "From Negro to Black to African American: The Power of Names and Naming." *Political Science Quarterly* 106.1 (Spring 1991): 83-107. Print.
- Matsuda, Paul Kei. "Alternative Discourses: A Synthesis." Schroeder, Helen Fox, Bizzell. 191-96. Print.
- "Mission Statement." *William Carey University Catalog 2010-2011*. Admissions. Hattiesburg: William Carey U, 2010. Print.

- Morse, Mitchell J. "The Shuffling Speech of Slavery: Black English, 1972." Ed. Patrick Bruch and Richard Marback. *The Hope and The Legacy*. Cresskill: Hampton P, 2005. Print.
- Moss, Beverly J. *A Community Text Arises: A Literate Text and A Literacy Tradition in African-American Churches*. Cresskill: Hampton P, 2003. Print.
- . "Ethnography and Composition: Studying Language at Home." *Methods and Methodology in Composition Research*. Kirsch and Sullivan. 153-71. Print.
- Murray, Donald M. "All Writing is Autobiography." *College Composition and Communication* 42.1 (February 1991): 66-74. Print.
- Odell, Lee. "Defining and Assessing Competence in Writing." Ed. Cooper. Urbana: NCTE, 1981: 95-138. Print.
- O'Neil, Peggy, Cindy Moore, and Brian Huot. *A Guide to College Writing Assessment*. Logan: Utah State UP, 2009. Print.
- Petraglia, Joseph. "Is There Life After Process? The Role of Social Scientism in a Changing Discipline." *Post-Process Theory: Beyond the Writing-Process Paradigm*. Ed. Thomas Kent. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1999. 49-64. Print.
- Pixton, William. "A Contemporary Dilemma: The Question of Standard English, 1974." *The Hope and the Legacy: The Past, Present and Future of 'Students' Right to Their Own Language'*. Ed. Patrick Bruch and Richard Marback. Cresskill: Hampton P, 2005. 63-71. Print.
- Powell, Malea. "Listening to Ghosts: An Alternative (Non)argument." *Alt Dis: Alternative Discourses and the Academy*. Ed. Christopher Schroeder, Helen Fox, and Patricia Bizzell. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook. 2002. Print.

Rickford, John Russell, and Russell John Rickford. *Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2000. Print.

Rose, Mike. "The Language of Exclusion: Writing Instruction at the University." 1985. Ed. Susan Miller. *The Norton Book of Composition Studies*. New York: Norton, 2009. Print.

---. *Lives on the Boundary: a Moving Account of the Struggles and Achievements of America's Educational Underclass*. New York: Penguin, 1989. Print.

Royster, Jacqueline Jones. "Academic Discourses or Small Boats on a Big Sea." Schroeder, Fox, Bizzell 23-30. Print.

---. "When the First Voice You Hear Is Not Your Own." *College Composition and Communication* 47 (Feb. 1996): 29-40. Print.

Sample student essay #1. "Uniforms for Unity." William Carey English Proficiency Exam. Hattiesburg: William Carey University. Print.

Sample student essay #2. Jake. William Carey English Proficiency Exam. Hattiesburg: William Carey University. Print.

Sample student essay #3. Mary. "Life's Experience." William Carey English Proficiency Exam. Hattiesburg: William Carey University. Print.

Sample student essay #4. Frances. "Memories of My Life." William Carey English Proficiency Exam. Hattiesburg: William Carey University. Print.

Sample student essay #5. Anna. "An Expectation and its Reality." William Carey English Proficiency Exam. Hattiesburg: William Carey University. Print.

Sample student essay #6. "A Change Must Happen." William Carey English Proficiency Exam. Hattiesburg: William Carey University. Print.

Sample student essay #7. "Lost Friend." William Carey English Proficiency Exam.

Hattiesburg: William Carey University. Print.

Saville-Troike, Muriel. *The Ethnography of Communication*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1982. Print.

Schroeder, Christopher, Helen Fox, and Patricia Bizzell, eds. *Alt Dis: Alternative Discourses and the Academy*. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 2002. Print.

Schultz, Katherine, and Glynda Hull. "Locating Literacy Theory in Out-of-School Contexts." *School's Out! Bridging Out-of-School Literacies with Classroom Practice*. Ed. Glynda Hull and Katherine Schultz. New York: Teachers College P, 2002. 11-31. Print.

Shaughnessy, Mina. *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing*. New York: Oxford UP, 1977. Print.

Smith, Allen. "No One Has a Right to His Own Language, 1976." *The Hope and the Legacy: The Past, Present and Future of 'Students' Right to Their Own Language'*. Ed. Patrick Bruch and Richard Marback. Cresskill: Hampton P, 2005. 73-9. Print.

Smitherman, Geneva. *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1977. Print.

Solley, Bobbie A. "On Standardized Testing: An ACEI Position Paper." ACEI position paper September 2007. The Free Library. 24 July 2009. Web. 5 Feb. 2010.

"Spoken Text." Ed. Bullock, Richard, and John Trimbur, eds. *The Politics of Writing Instruction: Postsecondary*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1991. Print.

“Students’ Right to Their Own Language.” *College Composition and Communication* 25 (Fall 1974): 1-32. Print.

Summerfield, Judith. “Is There a Life in This Text? Reimagining Narrative.”

Clifford and Schlib. 179-94. Print.

Tan, Amy. “Mother Tongue.” Ed. Richard Bullock, Maureen Daly Goggin and Francine Weinberg. New York: Norton, 2010. Print.

Tate, Gary and Edward P. J. Corbett. *The Writing Teacher’s Sourcebook*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford UP, 1988. Print.

Tatum, Beverly. “*Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*”: and *Other Conversations About Race*. New York: Perseus, 1997. Print.

Trimbur, John. *The Call to Write*. 4th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008. Print.

---. Foreword. Nelson and Evertz vii-x. Print.

Trimbur John, and Richard Bullock, ed. “Literacy and the Discourse of Crisis.” *The Politics of Writing Instruction: Postsecondary*. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 1991. 277-95. Print.

Valdes, Guadalupe. “Bilingual Minorities and Language Issues in Writing.” *Written Communication* 9.1 (1992): 85-136. Print.

Vann, Roberta J., Frederick O. Lorenz, and Daisy M. Meyer. “Error Gravity: Faculty Response to Errors in the Written Discourse of Nonnative Speakers of English.” *Assessing Second Language Writing in Academic Contexts*. Ed. Liz Hamp-Lyons. Norwood: Ablex, 1991. 181-96. Print.

Villaneuva, Victor, Jr. *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color*. Urbana: NCTE, 1993. Print.

West, Cornel. *The Cornel West Reader*. New York: Basic Civitas Books, 1999.

Print.

Wheeler, Donna Duck. *William Carey College: The First 100 Years*. Chicago:

Arcadia, 2006. Print.

White, Edward. *Assigning, Responding, Evaluating: A Writing Teacher's Guide*.

3rd ed. New York: St. Martin's P, 1995. Print.

---. *Developing Successful College Writing Programs*. Portland: Calendar Islands

Publishers, 1989. Print.

---. "Holisticism." *College Composition and Communication* 35 (1985): 400-9. Print.

---. "Pitfalls in the Testing of Writing." Greenberg, Wiener, and Donovan 53-78.

Print.

---. *Teaching and Assessing Writing*. 2nd ed. Portland: Calendar Islands Publishers,

1994. Print.

---. "Power and Agenda Setting in Writing Assessment." White, Lutz, and

Kamusikiri 9-24. Print.

White, Edward M, William D. Lutz, and Sandra Kamusikiri, eds. *Assessment of*

Writing: Politics, Policies, Practices. New York: MLA, 1996. Print.

William Carey Art Faculty Meeting. Personal interview. 2010. Cassette Tape.

William Carey Business Faculty Meeting. Personal interview. 2010. Cassette Tape.

William Carey Education Faculty Meeting. Personal interview. 2010. Cassette Tape.

William Carey English Faculty Focus Group Meeting. Personal interview. 2010.

Cassette Tape.

William Carey Faculty Meeting. Personal interview. 2009. Print.

Yancey, Kathleen Blake. "Looking Back as We Look Forward: Historicizing Writing Assessment as a Rhetorical Act." *College Composition and Communication* 50.3 (February 1999): 483-503. Print.

Zak, Frances, and Christopher C. Weaver, eds. *The Theory and Practice of Grading Writing*. Albany: State U of New York P, 1998. Print.

Zemelman, Steven, and Harvey Daniels. "Defining the Process Paradigm." Linda Miller Cleary and Michael Linn, ed. *Linguistics for Teachers*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993. 339-56. Print.